

INSIDE SOCCER

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CAPITULATION!

SOCCER AUSTRALIA AVERTS OVERSEAS PLAYER REVOLT

In Patrick Mangan's exclusive page three interview with Socceroo superstar Ned Zelic, the German-based midfielder reveals that he would have quit the national team if Soccer Australia had enforced FIFA's regulation and stopped him from playing at club level.

Zelic, who is in regular contact with the powerful Euro-based Socceroos, and who has put his hand up for the captain's armband, says other Socceroos in Europe would feel the same way.

Thankfully the situation has been sorted out, with a below strength Aussie squad being announced and no FIFA regulation being applied.

Yet in the end it is the game here in Australia that suffers, the fans want to see the Aussie stars, and often.

One Aussie superstar fans will see is Mark Bosnich (right). Manchester United's new keeper will make his debut for his new club against the Socceroos this week, although there may be a possibility he will play in the second game for Australia this Sunday at Stadium Australia.

At the time of going to press it was still unclear as to whether or not the promoters of the tour, Rivkin Entertainment, had been able to entice David Beckham to play on this most anticipated of tours.

With ticket sales booming these two games will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, despite the controversies over player selections in both camps.

Continued on page three ...



**SPECIAL MAN UNITED V SOCCEROOS ISSUE PLUS
ROBBIE SLATER, DAVID CLARKSON AND ALL THE
WORLD NEWS IN THE BEAUTIFUL GAME ...**

THE STATE OF PLAY IN AUSTRALIA

Welcome to the first edition of Inside Soccer under its new ownership. As we head towards the new season Inside Soccer will endeavour to bring you a comprehensive coverage of all that is happening in football.

It is a very exciting time in the development of Australian football with the success of Perth Glory and Northern Spirit bringing to the game the type of crowds and atmosphere never seen before. The introduction of Parramatta Power and Auckland Kings into the 1999-2000 season brings another tingle of excitement to the football fan.

Power's confidence, even arrogance, before their inclusion into the league is something to be admired rather than condemned. The overt display of ambition is a pleasure to see when compared to the insipid lack of ambition we have witnessed over the last twenty years (Glory and Spirit excepted). Power's excursion into the player market augurs well for their initiation into the NSL and hopes for a better first up performance than either Glory's and Spirit's first season is not unrealistic.

This promise of great things to come, nevertheless, must be tempered with caution. Previous involvement in the NSL by organisations involved in other professional sports have proven to be unsuccessful, indeed disastrous in some cases.

The NSL is not a goldmine at this stage of its development and it is yet to be seen how the Parramatta Leagues Club will react if things are not

going in accordance to plan.

Nevertheless, Parramatta Power has our best wishes and full support.

The "rejuvenation" of two clubs, Marconi and Newcastle Breakers, is another positive sign in our game.

Newcastle's sale saga finally ended with the purchase of the club by a local businessman, David Hall, and the introduction of Morris McAllister as General Manager. Having guided the defunct Sydney Cosmos from obscurity to relative success McAllister is well versed in the need to look at the big picture and Inside Soccer looks forward for an improved performance from the Breakers, on and off the field.

Marconi has always had the resources to build itself into the best club in the country. It has been the big fish in a little pond and many have hoped that they would take the big leap forward by investing greater capital from its asset rich social club and promoting itself, and the game of football, to the large population of the western suburbs.

That they haven't done that in the past means that they are now playing catch-up with the Northern Spirit and Perth Glory clubs.

It seems that Marconi has finally woken from its slumber and the promise from the Marconi citadel is that there will be oodles of lucre thrown at a marketing campaign.

On the other hand the well publicised financial woes of the Adelaide Sharks (see story on page six), Sydney United and the Gippsland Falcons, as well as the less obvious plights of the under capitalised Canberra Cosmos and Brisbane Strikes are a cause of concern to the well being of the National League.

The latest legal manoeuvres surrounding the Adelaide Sharks indicate that they will require a minor miracle to survive into next week, let alone the new season. The desperate attempts by the "Friends of West Adelaide" group to resuscitate a decaying entity serves no purpose other than to satisfy the whims of a small group of business people who refuse to let go of the past. The action of this group of people has prevented the inclusion of the Adelaide United consortium that, on paper, looked on track to provide the football loving public of Adelaide with a team that each of them could identify with. And we have seen what happens when a club orientates its marketing strategy toward the total market rather than a small, diminishing cultural group.

The future of Sydney United is similarly uncertain. With the loss of its coach and most of its players for the third straight year it is going to be nigh impossible for them to put together a competitive team for the new season. I know we all expressed the same sentiments the last two years but I can't see how they are going to be able to do it again! But you never know!

Inside Soccer will be bringing you all the developments of these and other breaking stories in the next few weeks.

PLEASE NOTE INSIDE SOCCER'S NEW CONTACT INFORMATION ON THE LEFT.

Inside Soccer

1/24 Prince William Drive, Seven Hills NSW 2147
Telephone: (02) 9838 4888 Fax: (02) 9838 4791
Deadline for Contributions: 12 noon Friday prior to publication.

Managing Editor: John Vrtaric
Email: johnv@insidesoccer.com.au
Editor: Aidan Ormond
E-mail: editor@insidesoccer.com.au
Contributors: Alan Clark, Bonnie Mersiades, Craig Wilson, Daryl Katz, Melissa Muscat, Patrick Mangan, AAP.

Photography: Allsport
Advertising: advertising@insidesoccer.com.au

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Pictured left is the world's greatest woman player, the USA's Mia Hamm.

I WOULD HAVE QUIT, SAYS ZELIC

By Patrick Mangan

Soccer Australia avoided a major controversy by deciding not to invoke a FIFA regulation demanding the release of overseas-based Socceroos to play Manchester United. Socceroo star Ned Zelic revealed that he would have quit the national team if Soccer Australia had gone ahead with its threat.

"All I know is if they (Soccer Australia) went as far as to do that, I'd retire from Australian soccer, full-stop," Zelic said on the eve of the announcement of the Socceroo squad. "I've heard they want to put their foot down, but what do they want to prove? To me, just the fact that they might do that would be a nightmare."

"I've spoken to a couple of teammates who told me about that (the possibility of the Soccer Australia ban) and it's just ridiculous. I can't come back for the games against United, so do they want to punish me for that?"

Like most of his European-based colleagues, Zelic, currently with TSV 1860 Munich in the German Bundesliga, is in the midst of pre-season training. "It's the most crucial time of the season," said the Socceroo midfielder, who last month declared his desire to be next captain of the national team.

"There's a lot of competition here in Europe. If you miss a lot of the pre-season, there's no way you're going to play the first game of the season."

Zelic said he realised he was

unlikely to be available for the matches against United as soon as the fixtures were announced. "I more or less knew that our coach wouldn't be too happy about it, and he wasn't. The first thing he said was 'Forget it'. I was obviously keen to come out and play against Manchester United, but you've got to look at both sides of the story."

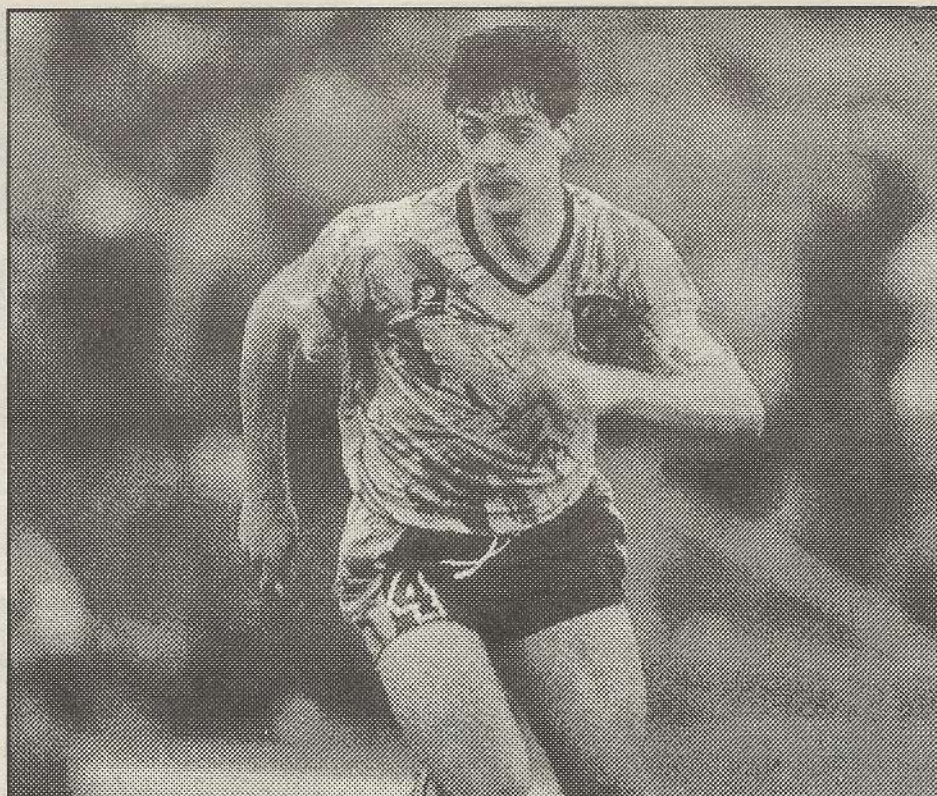
Zelic (right) expressed frustration at the fact that the series against England's treble-winners is taking place at this time of year. "I think maybe the people that organised the fixtures should have made a few enquiries (as to the availability of European-based Socceroos) beforehand, but I've heard that these were the only dates that were possible."

"Obviously Soccer Australia wasn't going to knock back the chance to play against the team that's just won the Champions League. In a way I can understand, but you've got to look at the players' point of view as well."

In more Man Utd tour news, organisers of Manchester United's two match tour of Australia plan to spend \$24 million next year to put on the biggest soccer show ever here, reports AAP.

The Rivkin Entertainment (RE) group needed to draw 60,000 crowds to Thursday's game at the MCG and the Stadium Australia game against the Socceroos three days later just to break even, they're well past that target already.

More than 80,000 fans are expected at each venue despite Australia fielding virtually its Olympic team and



reports that United midfield drawcard David Beckham and manager Alex Ferguson won't come.

RE managing director Dominic Galati said despite a legal row with the European champion over Beckham and Ferguson his organisation was ready to invest heavily in soccer again next year.

"We are confident that we will be doing it in the future and we are already looking at running an event that will cost around \$24 million," Galati said. "We're happy with what's transpired and we're looking at doing it again, next time we'll bring out three teams," he said.

The current tour cost RE \$8million with \$4million earmarked for the FA Cup winner, but Galati threatened to withhold \$2million if Ferguson and Beckham failed to show.

He said however there was growing hope that Beckham will join United here, but it's doubtful he'll see much action.

Galati said United was reluctant to bring him here, not because he was on honeymoon with Victoria "Posh Spice"

Adams, but because he's injured.

He said talks with United overnight had been more cordial after his company solicitors faxed the premier league champion saying they would be in breach of contract if the coach and the midfielder did not travel.

Ferguson has said he has to be at Buckingham Palace on July 21 to be knighted. "Manchester United has told us they want to sort it out with Alex Ferguson and that they want Beckham to come," he said.

"They've told us that Beckham is still recovering from a hamstring injury and even if he did come out he would not be playing in the first game. They say if he's coming he'll only play in the second match or he'll be on the bench," Galati said.

"They don't want to let the fans down," he said. "They want to do the right thing." See tour preview on next two pages.

BLANCO SNUB UPSETS SLATER

By AAP

Socceroo veteran Rob Slater is fuming and insulted that he's been overlooked for next week's games against Manchester United.

The evergreen Northern Spirit star was stunned that he was overlooked in the 20-man squad which is thin on experience with 14 of the players drawn from Olympic under 23 hopefuls.

Coach Raul Blanco opted for youth when his European-based players were prevented from travelling by their clubs for Thursday's game at the MCG and Sunday's match at the Olympic stadium.

"I called Raul to tell him I was fit and available," Slater said.

The former West Ham, Wolves, Southampton and Blackburn Rovers dynamo could not believe that his experience was overlooked in a squad crying out for guidance.

"It's an insult, he did not even bother to call me back, I'm really disappointed," Slater

told AAP.

Slater, 34, said he had always made himself available for international duty, sometimes to the detriment of his career.

"I had to leave West Ham and Southampton basically because I made myself available for the Socceroos," he said.

"I could understand when I was not picked in the Australian team to play against the World XI as it was a strong side. I was disappointed then but did not say anything," Slater said.

He said while he was keen to see young players flourish and play against world class sides like United, there needed to be a blend of experience - which the current squad did not have.

Only two of the side which started in the game against the World XI in Sydney last month - Alex Tobin and Stan Lazaridis - are in the current squad.

In other local news ... Syd U has appointed David Ratcliffe as their new coach ... Newcastle has signed Marconi striker Luke Tomich and Adelaide City's Travis Dodd, plus, for the first time, they will field a Colts side from next season ... a second string Australian side went through its first training session in Melbourne this morning and will train twice a day in the lead up to the Man U game ... in the World University Games in Spain Australia was eliminated in the group stages.



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EXPERIMENTAL SOCCEROO SQUAD FOR MAN UNITED TOUR

Perhaps it was too much to ask. The full-strength 1999 Socceroo line-up to appear on home soil twice in a row in as many months has not materialised. Instead the fans will be treated to what amounts to the Olympic side for the two games against Manchester United this week.

Names such as Zeljko Susa, Steven Laybutt and Dragi Nastevski are hardly household names to the fans in mainstream Australia, but as Olyroo aspirants, this tour will do them no harm and they, and the other potential Olyroos, will come out fighting. Their fitness levels are up too, thanks to a rigorous winter campaign and players like Kasey Wehrman, Brett Emerton, Simon Colosimo and Vinnie Grella would not look out of place against anyone, not even Man Utd.

There are some interesting choices from the overseas contingent. Manchester City's Danny Tiatto would love nothing more than to put one over on his crosstown rivals. The Manchester papers would love it if Tiatto did the business over the city's biggest side.

Ross Aloisi is a player we have barely seen since he left for Europe a few years ago. While his brother John has scaled the heights in Serie A and the English Premier, Ross has quietly gone about his business in the smaller leagues of Switzerland and France. He showed at the Atlanta Olympics that he is a useful player

if given the opportunity.

The MCG game will be a special event for Aurelio Vidmar. The Japan-based striker last played there against Iran in the now infamous World Cup qualifier. His early misses, if converted, could have finished off the doughty Iranians. They didn't and we've been hurting ever since. No doubt this great Socceroo, who should be playing in Australia in the not too distant future, would love to atone by scoring against such marquee opposition in front of another large gallery.

For us, Hayden Foxe is the standout overseas player in the squad. Aussie through and through, his commitment to the cause of the national team shows up some of the bigger Euro stars' hearts. He is a gifted defender who is destined for big things on the Olympic stage next year. Should be first choice on the team sheet.

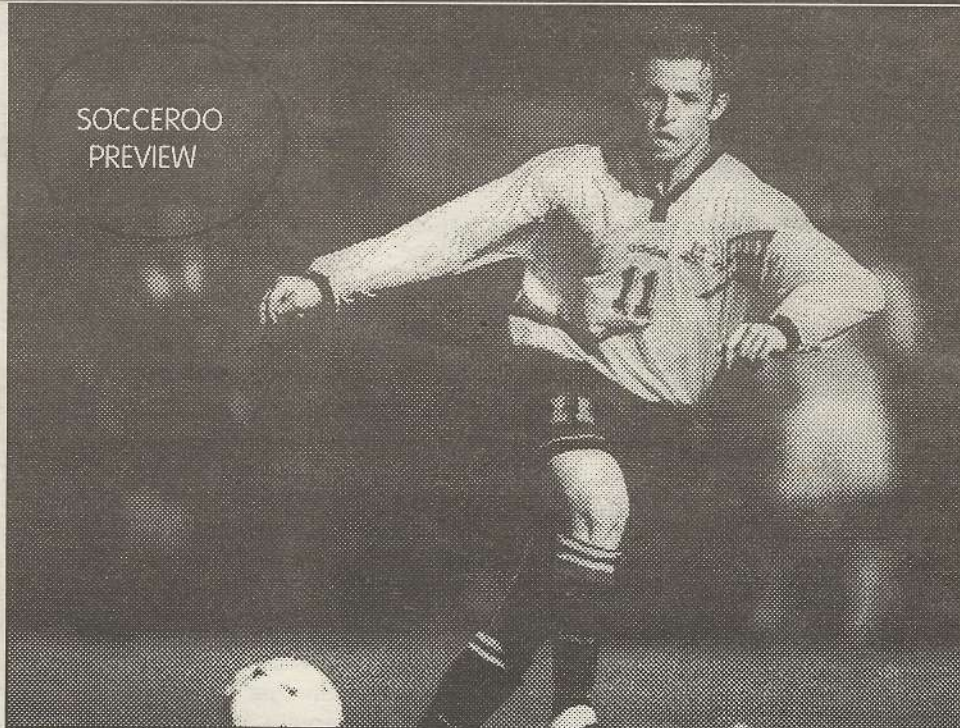
Stan Lazaridis is the only one of the 'Aussie Premier League Rat Pack' (Bosnich excepted) to have returned. This probably says more about his multicultural club West Ham, and their ties with Australian youth players, than anything else. Nevertheless, he is a player of genuine quality.

Of the local players, all four keepers named are capable, such is the depth in the Australian ranks. Even if Bosnich plays both games for his new club, each of the keepers can be relied on.

Alex Tobin, however, is a worry. This Socceroo stalwart

looked slow against the class of Klinsmann and Vieri last month. The fact that this was his only game in the off-season to date adds to the worry. Cole and Yorke can be devastating and can exploit slowness off the mark very easily. Northern Spirit's Clayton

SOCCEROO PREVIEW



Keepers

Jason Petkovic
Michael Petkovic
Joe Didulica
Danny Milosevic
(Sydney only)

Defenders

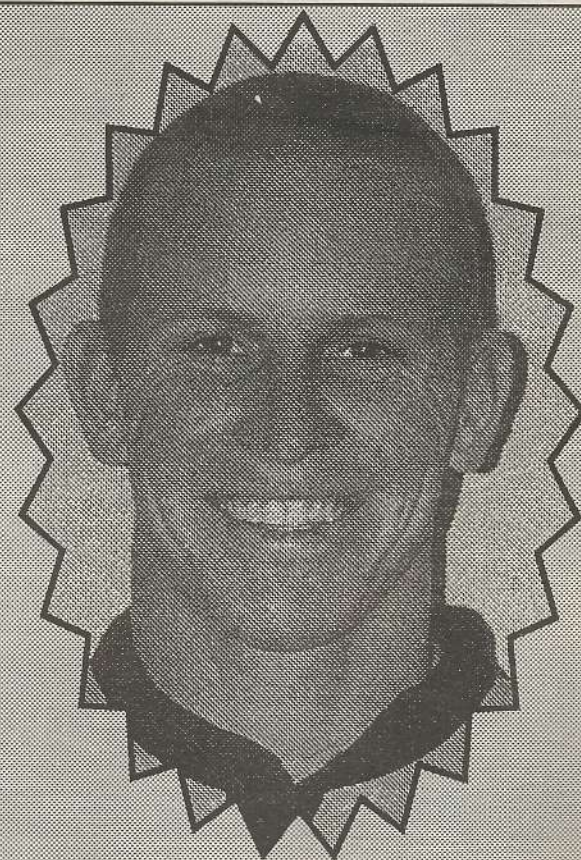
Con Blatsis
Jacob Burns
Simon Colosimo
Hayden Foxe
Dragi Nastevski
Stephen Laybutt
Stan Lazaridis
Alex Tobin

Midfielders

Ross Aloisi
Brett Emerton
Vince Grella
Danny Tiatto
Kasey Wehrman
(right)
Zeljko Susa

Strikers

Michael Curcija
Aurelio Vidmar



THE AUSTRALIAN
SQUAD FOR THE TOUR
(as at time of press)

Possible starting eleven: 3-5-2

M. Petkovic (g)
Colosimo (d)
Tobin (d)
Foxe (d)
Lazaridis (m)
Aloisi (m)
Tiatto (m) or Emerton
Grella (m)
Vidmar or Wehrman (m)
Zane (s)
Curcija (s)



Zane has got amongst the goals recently on the Olyroos' friendly tour to Asia and New Zealand. These were, however, meaningless friendlies. He has to produce when it is needed most, just ask Spirit fans.

Michael Curcija will probably partner big Zane upfront in the duo that destroyed the Brazilian Olympic side 16 months ago.

The side will be coached by

Raul Blanco once more, as Soccer Australia continues to dither over its selection of coach. These games against Man Utd, and the all-star match would have been perfect bloodings for the incumbent.

THEY'RE HERE ... WELL MOST OF THEM!

By Daryl Katz

Manchester United, European Cup winners, Premier League champions and FA Cup holders, fly into Australia this week on the first leg of a pre-season warm-up tour.

The Red Devils will appear twice in Australia, in Melbourne on Thursday July 15 and at Stadium Australia in Sydney on Sunday July 18, taking on the Socceroos as they attempt to regain their fitness and sharpness ahead of another marathon season.

The last few weeks have been a trying time for the club, with a number of controversies threatening to upset their pre-season preparation.

Most notably, United have accepted a Football Association offer of a one-year exemption from the FA Cup so that they can take part in the World Club Championship in Brazil in January 2000.

The Football Association believe that United's absence from the Brazil tournament will have an adverse effect on England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup, and have identified a withdrawal from the cup as the only way of easing the January fixture congestion.

However, the move has not found favour in the eyes of the United supporters or the vast majority of English clubs, who claim that the world's premier club cup competition would be devalued if the defending champions withdrew.

United themselves claim that if they take part in all available tournaments, they face a potential 77-match marathon which would stretch even their vast playing resources.

The club have been in the headlines for other reasons as well, including the proposed sale of millions of United shares, currently held by chairman Martin Edwards. Various potential buyers have been quoted, from the Sultan of Brunei to a syndicate of high-profile racehorse owners.

Even as United depart Britain on their way Down Under, they find themselves flying into the teeth of another controversy. United will arrive without their inspirational manager Alex Ferguson, who will remain in England to accept his knighthood, as well as star midfielder and major drawcard David Beckham.

Australian tour organisers, Rivkin Entertainment, have threatened to withhold appearance money from United should Beckham not appear. While they have admitted defeat in their attempts to bring him here for the Melbourne match, the promoters are insisting that he join

the tour in time to appear in Sydney.

Currently however, it appears as though United will defy these orders, even at the risk of forfeiting some of their agreed fee. The star player has just returned from his



honeymoon, having been granted additional time off by Ferguson following his extraordinary efforts throughout last season.

Beckham was arguably United's most influential player in all competitions, and while Ferguson's squad rotation saw many players rested regularly, Beckham was asked to shoulder additional responsibility, providing the team with cutting edge and penetration down the right side.

United are now clearly unwilling to risk the player, who will have only a week of pre-season training under his belt, in Sydney. Indications are that Beckham may join the tour in Shanghai, having undergone intensive training in England.

United have omitted several other key players from last season's campaign. Defenders Ronny Johnsen, Gary Neville and Jaap Stam, all of who struggled with injury or exhaustion at various stages of last season, will not take part in the tour.

Attacking midfielder Paul Scholes will also stay behind, awaiting the birth of his first child.

Despite the absentees, the United squad will be strong and well representative of the best the club

Man Utd v Socceroos Tour Preview

can offer. Welsh winger Ryan Giggs will be on view, as will the dynamic strike pairing of Dwight Yorke and Andy Cole (left). Catalyst for the treble triumph, the revitalised Teddy Sheringham, will also appear.

United will play a depleted Australian national side, as many overseas professionals remain in pre-season training with their clubs. Australian stars Harry Kewell of Leeds United, Mark Viduka of Glasgow Celtic, John Aloisi of Coventry City and Paul Okon of Fiorentina have all been denied permission to appear.

United will field a side full of class in both matches. The Australian public will have a rare glimpse of the best soccer talent on offer in Europe, as well as a sneak preview of the next generation of talent to emerge from Ferguson's

much-vaunted Old Trafford youth system.

The treble winners find themselves the

position of being on tour within two weeks of kicking off their 1999-2000 season. They will still be in the Far East just ten days before the Charity Shield at Wembley, against premiership runners up Arsenal.

This tour is for the purpose of fine tuning their minds and bodies for the challenge of the season ahead, and as such these matches are an exciting prospect.

The storm over missing players continues to threaten the smooth running of the tour, and even to result in its cancellation.

This can only detract, however, from a spectacle which should be savoured by all soccer followers across the country.

It would be a great pity if the tour were to be judged by its absentees instead of the considerable amount of talent that will be on view.

***Read next week for Daryl Katz' match analysis of the Man Utd v Socceroos game at Stadium Australia. He is a former Soccer Weekly writer who covered the 1999 Champions League final in Barcelona.**



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SHARKS TO BE DEVoured?

The Adelaide Sharks could be wound up as early as Thursday after all bidders for the club withdrew their offers in the Supreme Court. Justice Brian Martin said any prospective owners had until Thursday to come up with a suitable new bid or it was likely he would direct the club's administrator to begin liquidation. The debt-ridden Sharks were put into administration in March, with two bids put to creditors in April.

The creditors voted to accept a joint bid between new entity Adelaide United Soccer Club (AUSC) and a group of Sharks board members called the Friends of West Adelaide (FOWA), rejecting an offer from former club chairman Con Makris. But the Sharks' board then voted not to ratify that deal and a new bid was proposed by the Samaras group, eight Greek businessmen seeking to revive the club in its existing form.

But financial administrator Bruce Mulvaney referred the matter to the Supreme Court after a complex debate arose over whether the joint bid between FOWA and United was still legally binding. Adelaide United and the Sharks then separately applied to Soccer Australia (SA) for Ericsson Cup licences for the coming season, with the Sharks granted a licence on June 27.

The Samaras group and Adelaide United both effectively withdrew their proposals in court, leaving the club without a bidder. The offer was withdrawn in the Supreme Court without being put to a vote because the group admitted it did not have the necessary player support.

"The parties are on notice that it is at least the tentative view of the administrator that if a proposal is not received within seven days the administrator may well be joining the deputy commissioner of taxation in asking this court to terminate the deed," Justice Martin said.

Mulvaney said the players, who are owed \$320,000 in unpaid match payments, would also stand to gain if a new deal was reached, as they would have to wait on lengthy court battles for the chance to recover any money in the case of liquidation.

Australian Soccer Players Association chief executive, Brendan Schwab, said that under the Collective Bargaining Agreement any club striking a new deal would have to pay the players all money owing to take its place in the league.

He said if no such proposal was made in the next few days there would almost certainly be only one NSL club in Adelaide (Adelaide City) for the coming season. Supreme Court Justice Brian Martin warned that the likely alternative was liquidation of the club.

But Sharks spokesman Zis Ginos said the same offer would be put to creditors and it was up to administrator Bruce Mulvaney and the players to work out how to share the money. "If the club isn't there, there won't be any money, it is the only money that's available, nobody else is putting up cash," Ginos told AAP. "If it goes into liquidation there'll be no money for players or anybody else."

Samaras lawyer Ian Robertson told the court it was Mulvaney's fees that were preventing a deal being struck. "Any proposal we wish to put to creditors is dependent on having the support of the players," Robertson said. "We have not been able to secure that support and the principal difficulty is in relation to the remuneration being paid to the administrator."

Australian Soccer Players Association chief executive Brendan Schwab said the offer had been unacceptable, as \$286,000 of the \$300,000 would go to Mulvaney, leaving the players to get a tiny percentage of the \$320,000 owed to them in missed payments. He said the club would not be able to operate if the players were not paid all money owed.

JOEYS IN TRAINING CAMP FOR GAME WITH BAHRAIN

Coach Les Scheinflug has assembled a group of 24 players for an Under-17 training camp at Valentine Park, home of the NSW Soccer Federation, as preparations begin for the final World Cup Qualifier against Bahrain next month. Should Australia beat Bahrain they face a difficult Group C draw (see below).

The Australian Under-17s won their qualifying group in Fiji in May, and were to have played Bahrain directly after, however the two legged final qualifier has now been re-scheduled for August, first leg in Canberra (August 14) and second leg in Bahrain (August 27). Scheinflug and assistant coach Kelly Cross will assess the squad over the next ten days at both Parklea and the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra (from 11th July), before selecting an 18-man squad to travel to a training camp overseas.

The boys will spend 3 weeks in Germany with five training matches planned, before arriving back in early August for final match preparations.

The full 24 man squad:

Matthew Milosevic	Goalkeeper	Jade North	Midfielder
Jess Kedwell-Vanstrattan	Goalkeeper	Wayne Srhoj	Midfielder
Daniel Schwarzer	Goalkeeper	James Johnson	Midfielder
Radoslav Culibrk	Defender	Anthony Doumanis	Midfielder
Shane Cansdell-Sherriff	Defender	Fabian Lettieri	Midfielder
Aaron Goulding	Defender	Mislav Saric	Midfielder
Steve Laurie	Defender	Lucas Pantelis	Midfielder
Mark Byrnes	Defender	Louis Brain	Striker
Peter Gavaghan	Defender	Joseph Di Iorio	Striker
Victor Fernandez	Defender	Scott McDonald	Striker
Shane Lockhart	Defender	Dylan MacAllister	Striker
Iain Fyfe	Defender	Tallan Martin	Striker

Group A

Nov 10 - New Zealand v United States
Nov 11 - Poland v Uruguay
Nov 13 - New Zealand v Uruguay, Poland v United States
Nov 16 - New Zealand v Poland, United States v Uruguay
Matches at Auckland

Group B

Nov 11 - Ghana v Spain, Mexico v Thailand
Nov 13 - Ghana v Mexico, Spain v Thailand
Nov 16 - Ghana v Thailand, Mexico v Spain
Matches at Napier

Group C

Nov 12 - Australia or Bahrain v Brazil, Germany v Mali
Nov 14 - Brazil v Mali, Australia or Bahrain v Germany
Nov 17 - Brazil v Germany, Australia or Bahrain v Mali
Matches at Christchurch

Group D

Nov 12 - Burkina Faso v Jamaica, Paraguay v Qatar
Nov 14 - Burkina Faso v Qatar, Jamaica v Paraguay
Nov 17 - Burkina Faso v Paraguay, Jamaica v Qatar
Matches at Dunedin

Nov 20 - Quarter-finals

(Match 25) Group A winners v Group B runners-up, Auckland

(Match 26) Group B winners v Group A runners-up, Napier

Nov 21

(Match 27) Group C winners v Group D runners-up, Christchurch

(Match 28) Group D winners v Group C runners-up, Dunedin

Nov 24 - Semi-finals

Match 25 winners v match 27 winners, Christchurch

Match 26 winners v match 28 winners, Auckland

Nov 27 - Final, third-place play-off



KINGS IN

FIFA has approved the inclusion of New Zealand based soccer club Auckland Kings into the 1999/2000 Ericsson Cup Season.

The Auckland Kings have been granted admittance to the Australian League for an initial period of two years, and will join Parramatta Power as the two new comers to the Ericsson Cup. "Soccer appreciates this landmark decision from FIFA, particularly from the Oceania viewpoint of a developing Confederation, where the decision will be good for football in the region," said Soccer Australia CEO David Woolley.

BIG BOB BIG WINNER

By Aidan Ormond

The resurgent Newcastle Breakers' awards night has been held, and 'big' was the theme of the glittering night. It was a big event, almost 250 packed the Mayfield ex-Services Club, while big Bob Catlin scooped the pool, winning the players' player of the year and the supporters' player of the year.

Catlin, 33, was his trademark humble in accepting the awards, thanking the club, the players and coach Lee Sterrey for resurrecting his career that had been residing "at Rookwood cemetery".

The night was also significant

from an administrative side - it was the first time new CEO David Hall, and GM Morris McAlister had been formally introduced to the club. Both received warm welcomes.

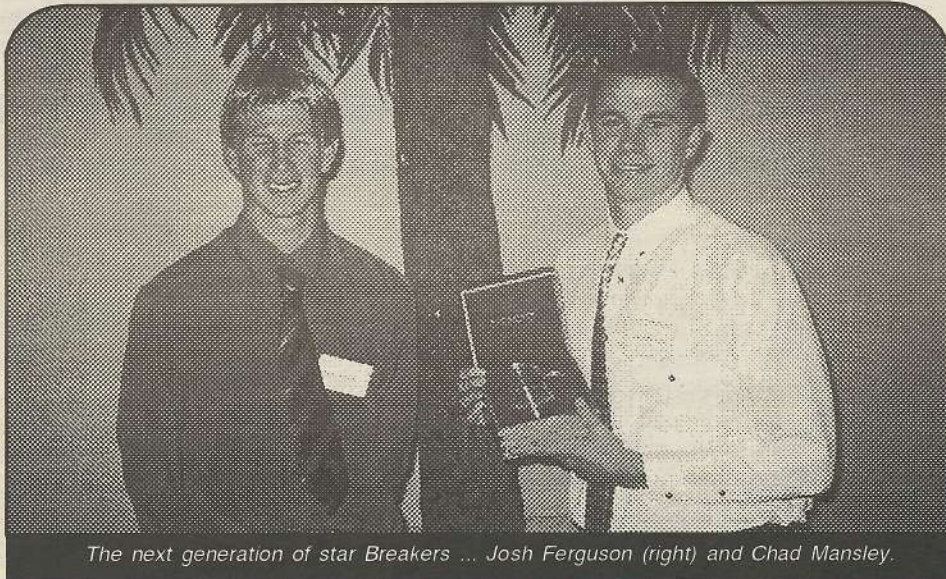
Hall spoke passionately about his wish to help take the club back to its glory days and of the incredible potential of the area, a region that has produced "so many greats".

He also spoke of his soccer career and the affection he has for the NSW region and club.

One great who sadly could not make it was Craig Johnson. The former Liverpool star was struck down with the dreaded flu, as was outgoing chairman Bill Collins.

Another feature of the night was local Channel nine affiliate NBN TV presenting a video highlights package of the year. The video included some of the best goals of the year (Greg Owens' winner against Glory at home receiving wild applause) and some of the hilarious outtakes from the side's TV commercial, with captain Shane Pryce's performances worthy of a Jackie Chan flick!

With the club finishing its highest ever in the NSL (two wins out of the six) coach Sterrey spoke about the need to develop changing national perceptions of the club. "I believe we have gone some way to changing the 'cellar dweller' mentality that Australia has about the club," he said. "If we can stay in the top half of the table, preferably in the top six, then we will have done the job of



The next generation of star Breakers ... Josh Ferguson (right) and Chad Mansley.

putting the respect back into the club."

He added that one of the reasons the side had done so well was that there were "no egos, unlike some of the Sydney clubs", just hard workers who got on well with each other. Those sentiments were echoed by club captain Shane Pryce, who cited the success of Steve Waugh's Aussie cricket team as a good example of a squad with guts and determination, something he felt his side had shown.

The youth team awards were also made, with Josh Ferguson winning the players' player award, while the supporters' trophy went to Paul Wheeler. Youth coaches David Lowe and Bobby Naumov noted the commitment of their young charges who finished fourth on 59 points, just eight points behind champions the AIS.

All in all, a positive evening,

with the success of the first and youth teams buoying fans and heightening anticipation for the coming season. And with gun striker John Buonavoglia with one year left on his contract, and the resigning of inspirational captain Shane Pryce, plus Young Soccerroo keeper Brad Swancott and Glenn Sprod and Todd McManus, the nucleus of the side should be retained for the coming season.

As for the star of the night, 'Big' Bob Catlin said that if the club would have him, he would love to come back. Should be no doubt about that.

**See our story on new Breakers CEO David Hall in next month's Inside Soccer.*



Bobby Catlin after receiving his award.

BREAKERS START TODAY!

As from today, the hard-working Newcastle Breakers are back at work and in preparation for the coming season.

Hoping to gain a head-start on their Ericsson Cup rivals, coach Lee Sterrey has called in the troops for pre-season training in what could be a make or break season for the much-improved side. Sterrey feels that fitness and match readiness will be all important if Newcastle are to bid for honours in 1999-2000.

The roll-call at Breakers' Stadium was expected to reveal several changes to the player-roster, with Pryce, Swancott, Sprod and McManus being offered two year contracts; Mark Wilson awarded a year's contract; while Wiczorek, Owens and Buonavoglia (below) all on upgraded

terms.

The Breakers are also confident that they are on the verge of securing the services of Young Soccerroo Travis Dodd from Adelaide City. The pacy Dodd was a squad member for the recent Nigeria WYC, but failed to make the run on side.



Also expect some other new signings as the ambitious Sterrey looks to make history this coming season and take the Breakers into their first ever finals appearance.

The off-field team that made it happen for the Breakers in their best ever season:

First team coach: Lee Sterrey
Assistant and youth coach: David Lowe
Assistant youth coach: Bobby Naumov
Goalkeeping coach: Steve Dorman
Senior manager: Con Tagaroulas
Youth manager: Andrew Licata
Physiotherapist: Regina Larard
Sports trainer: Angie Milton
Dentist: Andrew Johnson
Doctor: Janet Hall
Pastor: Mark Zaia

CLARKSON REVEALS NIGHTMARE

South Melbourne's David Clarkson came face to face with tragedy minutes before he was to fly out of Melbourne with the South Melbourne team to face Sydney United in the second leg of the major semi final. His two young daughters were struck by a car. Both were seriously injured, one remaining in a coma for more than a week. Inside Soccer's Alan Clark chatted with the amiable South dynamo ...

The first most knew about the tragedy was after South's 0-1 loss in that game, a result that saw them win through to the Grand Final after winning 2-1 at home the previous week. Captain Paul Trimboli revealed the tragedy in the post-match interview and dedicated the win to Clarkson and his two daughters. Most were only to find out the terrible details in the following day's papers. David Clarkson saw little of anyone in the days that followed, maintaining a vigil at his daughters' bedside. He had his priorities sorted out, and they were right.

As his daughters' condition improved, David felt able to return to the South fold. There was a Grand Final to play, and he was a key player in the team going for their second successive national championship. But how did all this affect him and when did he decide that he should p l a y ?

In an interview with Inside Soccer's Alan Clark, Clarkson explains the circumstances he found himself in, and thanks the football community for sending in their messages of support. He speaks

of his younger daughter's insistence that he play in the Grand Final and bring home a medal for her, and tells of the condition of his older daughter - six-year-old Elodie.

AC: David, the whole football world knows your preparation for the your Grand Final this year was held under the background of the terrible accident that befell your two young daughters: Brooke and Elodie. Can you firstly tell us how their present c o n d i t i o n ?

DC: Well Alan, they've certainly recovered beyond what we'd expected. Brooke - the younger one, she's five - she had a broken hip. She'll have her plaster on for another two weeks and will make a full recovery. Elodie is six. When we went into emergency the doctor said that they had to remove a blood clot from her brain. They didn't know how it was going to go, it was pretty-much fifty-fifty.

After the operation, the doctor came back and said "We've removed the clot, it probably wasn't as big as expected, but I need to let you know she's probably not

going to survive this operation."

That was the worst experience of my life. I could never explain to anyone how bad I felt at that time. I couldn't believe what I was being told. I didn't want it to be h a p p e n i n g .

Since then - we're five weeks on - the recovery that Elodie has made has been remarkable. She left Monash Hospital for the Victorian Rehabilitation Centre, which is basically a big physiotherapy hospital, and she left there yesterday (Friday last week) and she's now home.

She's walking and talking and recognising people, which is fantastic. She recognised me when I walked in the room - I guess at the start of all this I thought if she recognised me I'll be happy with that. She did. She said "Dad, it's so good to see you!", and she came up and cuddled me.

The emotion I felt then was unbelievable.

There's always a down-side. Because it was such a traumatic accident, her brain has taken quite a severe knock, and at this stage she's not reached where they'd hope she'd be as an average six-year-old. So she's a little bit behind, but we're only five weeks into her rehabilitation, so we're hoping she'll still make a recovery. I know it'll be a long r o a d .

I suspect she'll never recover one-hundred percent, but I'm hoping she'll recover to the extent that she'll have a life which she's comfortable with. That's all we can hope for at this stage.

AC: As the accident and the effect it had on your daughters and your family became known, fans, players, officials - everyone in the game - seemed to want to reach out to you and provide support to help you through what we expected were going to be very dark days. It was s p o n t a n e o u s .

DC: The support that I've had is overwhelming. I never expected it. I picked up the paper the day after the boys won in Sydney to see headlines that South Melbourne did it for DC. The emotion I felt was unbelievable, and I didn't think I'd get that response.

The support from the community has been absolutely fantastic right through. The club was inundated with faxes and e-mails from people giving their support and letting me know my daughters were in their thoughts.

I had faxes from National League teams including from teams in Melbourne and Sydney. As you know, just before the Grand Final, my daughters were given two care-bears by the players of Sydney



United who had signed them. That was phenomenal - at such an important time for them, and leading up to a Grand Final against my team, that they could show the goodwill to care about what my daughters and I had been through at that stage. I really want to let people know that the support that they'd given me has been something that I've grasped hold of. Danni, my partner, and I, have been through a really traumatic time, but knowing that people were there, and really and genuinely care for us is something that's helped us through a horrible time.

AC: The accident involving your daughters was on the afternoon of your planned departure to Sydney to play the second leg of the major semi final. You had to withdraw from that match and didn't travel to Sydney, and it probably wasn't until Paul Trimboli's after-match comments that most people knew something of the reason for your non a p p e a r a n c e .

A fortnight later your team was due to play in a Grand Final.

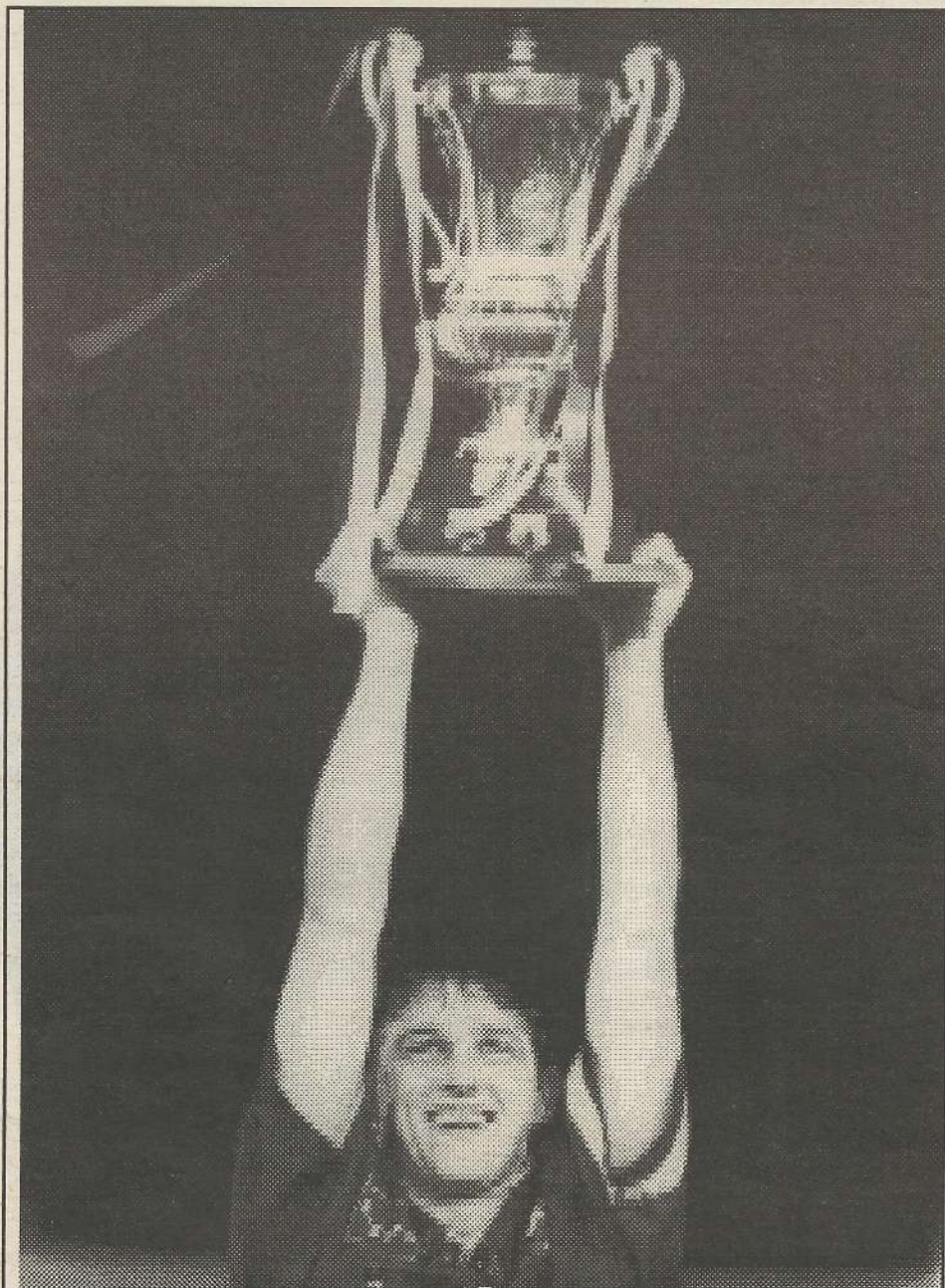
Can you take us through that fortnight, and tell us when you decided you felt mentally fit and prepared enough to play?

DC: I was leaving for the airport when I heard the news of the girls, so it wasn't an option to play that second-leg game.

The following week, I didn't really train at all. I was at the hospital pretty-much twenty-four hours a day. That whole week is a blur.

I went down to training on the Tuesday to see the team and thank them for what they'd done. I know they'd got behind me. It was a tough game for them (in Sydney), and they had their backs against the wall, and I just thought about Paul Trimboli's comments after the game that they did it for me and the girls. It was

Continued on next page ...



Continued from page eight

through this I was on the road to recovery, and then I had a full week before the Grand Final.

I set myself a goal of being able to train for that whole week with the prospect of the Grand Final. I thought if I could train and be able to concentrate for an hour and a half of training, then I'd be OK.

I managed to get through that, and I said to myself "You've got through the training, you can get through the Grand Final."

To tell you the truth, knowing that there was a Grand Final at the end of it, with so much doom and gloom around, was almost a positive in my life. It was something I could aim for. I knew the importance of the game for the club and the rest of the players - that we were going for back-to-back. So I thought - OK, let's have a go at this.

After Wednesday night training, I thought I'd be OK.

AC: The newspapers had a story about how your younger daughter almost insisted you play in the Grand Final. Tell us about that.

DC: I hadn't been able to speak to Elodie because she was still in a coma at that stage, but Brooke thought that (South coach) Ange Postecoglou would be cross with me because I wasn't going to training, and she said "Daddy, that's your job. You need to be there or else you'll get into trouble."

She also asked me "If you win the Grand Final, do you get another medal?", because she saw my one from last year. I said "Yes, I do." And she told me, "Can you please play and show me your medal when you win it."

So at that time, I thought, when it's coming from your youngest child who is five years of age, and she wants you to go out, and it's only three or four hours out of my day, I thought I could do it for them.

My partner Dani has been a fantastic support to me and we're expecting our first child together in three weeks, so I thought I owed it to a lot of people to do the job.

AC: So you decided you're mentally and physically fit enough to play in the Grand Final. But you're playing against a team where all the players have just given your daughters two signed care-bears....

DC: I thought that was an absolutely fantastic gesture. Coming from a guy like David Mitchell, who has played all a round the world, and I guess I know what he's like and the teams that are prepared by him - they are in the same mould - I knew it was a genuine gesture, but that once we'd stepped out over that white line, there would be no holds barred, that it would be all-out.

After the first five minutes when I got an elbow in the side of the head, I thought "Yeah - we're definitely in a game here!"

AC: South Melbourne was under the hammer in the first half - both coaches said the wind was strongly favouring the end South defended in the first half - but in the second half the momentum went South's way. The clincher really was that third goal where you and George Goutzioulis were involved. You set up Goutzioulis free on the right wing, and he crossed the ball for John Anastasiadis to spectacularly head home that third goal.

Most of the crowd would have been watching John Anastasiadis celebrating - he knows how to work a crowd - he ran to the corner flag and accepted the glory.

I had a look at what you were doing at that time - you were flat on your back, your arms above your head, staring at the sky. What was going through your head at the time, David, were you relieved that it was finally over?

DC: I think, Alan at that stage, it was just pure relief. Not only the fact that we'd gone three-one up - we'd worked on a move like that for the past three years. Jimmy Tsekenis was involved as well, played the ball in to me, and we work on that all the time at training nights, this time it worked in the game.

I thought at that stage we'd definitely won the game, and the fact that it was such a really good move - I guess there were all sort of emotions going through my mind, but the thing that I most remember was I was so relieved that it looked like we were going to win the game, although the finally whistle seemed to take an eternity.

At the start of the game I wanted to enjoy it and be part of it, but I also really wanted to win it. So at that stage, I thought we'd won it.

AC: That goal came with three minutes of normal time left, but Danny Townsend hadn't read the script and managed to score for Sydney United in injury-time. You probably watched the Manchester United Bayern Munich game a couple of days before (won by Manchester United which came back from 0-1 down after ninety minutes, scoring twice in injury-time to win 2-1), so what was happening with you after Danny's goal?

DC: Even when we were 0-1 down, I was confident that we'd pull it back. When it went 3-2, I spoke with Simon Micallef, the referee, and he said "Yes, that's about ninety(minutes), but I hadn't counted on the lengthy injury time."

He played five minutes injury-time and I actually wanted to strangle him! I thought "Simon, don't do this to me. I need this win - please, that's enough time, blow the whistle."

Even now, when I watch the game on the television, when it goes 3-2 I'm still nervous because I still think they're going to score the third one!

When he blew the whistle, it was the biggest relief I've ever felt.

ARNIE'S ARMY'S NIGHT OF NIGHTS!

By Melissa Muscat

You know it's the irrepressible Northern Spirit fans when a player's underwear is paraded as a special guest at their awards night! Yes, that's right, Graham Arnold's underwear made an appearance as the great man's proxy last Saturday night at the Bowling Club behind Spirit Park as part of the club's inaugural Supporters' Awards ceremony.

It was a typically boisterous affair as the 'Bob Standers' made their awards to the players on the supporters' night of nights.

It was no surprise that Paul 'Hendo' Henderson won the the supporters' main award, particularly as the player has often been the one who has personally thanked the many thousands of fans that have rolled up for the inaugural season at Spirit.

There were, however, a number of interesting other awards that were handed out. A gong that can only be described as 'Mr Congeniality' went to Paul 'Billy' Bilokapic while the goal of the year (presumably from home games only) went to that absolute cracker by Daniel Watkins

against Melbourne Knights. A goal that has been spoke of in terms of that great Maradona goal in 1986 against England in the World Cup. Yes, it was a worthy winner.

'King' Kres Marusic was also honoured by the fans for the number of goals the skilful midfielder scored (and one or two could have easily won the goal of the season had it not been for the Watkins effort). Marusic is currently overseas.

Robbie Slater (right), the man himself, was also honoured, in a category called 'pisshead'. Although it was hard to understand the rationale behind the award, the gist was that Robbie was a sociable lad. Anyway, on the night he had to consume the contents of something resembling a yardglass, but he fell short of the mark.

Perhaps this award was off the mark after all, but Slater did mention that he hoped he had not disgraced this most prestigious category.



In fact, all players, even the injured Tony Perenich who has yet to kick a ball for Spirit, were awarded certificates thanking them for their contributions.

The man who has pulled everything together for Spirit, Chairman Remo Nogarotto, also spoke during the evening.

The night was capped off by a highlights package of some of those memorable moments during what was an absolutely wonderful year for Spirit and Australian Soccer. And of course what would a supporters' night be without a bit of community singing.

The 'national anthem' was sung with much gusto, yet it did not have the words 'Advance Australia Fair' in it. No, it was more on the lines of the recent Plugger Lockett song 'There's only ...'. In this case, it was "There's only Northern Spirit, one Northern Spirit, one Northern Spirit, there's only one Northern Spirit."

Ain't that true.

In other Spirit news ... they play Highland United on Sunday July 25 at the Bradman Oval, Bowral. It is a charity day with money going to Children's Cancer Research, with the day starting at 8.30am and Spirit playing at 1.30pm. There is also a celebrity game and you can meet all the players on the day. Call John on 0412178666 for details. And the injured trio of Adem Poric, Troy Cranney and Tony Perenich are all expected to be back on the park for this coming season.

NSW SUPER LEAGUE

Super League hit semi-finals mode on the weekend, with Blacktown playing Macarthur on Saturday at Jensen Park.

It was the Demons who came out on top after a 3-1 win over the Rams, a welcome win after three straight defeats.

The Demons took the lead in the 38th minute. Ever present Damien Brown placed a superb ball into the path of namesake Smith, who smashed the ball from 25 metres into the top right hand corner of the net.

Eric Williams hit the post for the Rams after the break, but on 64 minutes Brown and Aaron Holst again set up Damien Smith, who headed home to make it 2-0. Holst then made it 3-0, although Macarthur's Williams managed a consolation goal with ten minutes remaining.

Blacktown City — Greco, Yates (Salameh), Lowe, Langan, Riches, Bradley, Foxe, Cleary, Smith, brown, Bennet(Holst).

Mac Rams: Crawley, Valle, Lloyd, Bourke, Williams, Willard, Rastall, Knight, Aschner (Whiddett), Brookes(Cevenini).

On Sunday the elimination semi-final between the Parramatta Eagles and Bankstown City Lions was as tense as expected.

It was the Parramatta side who prevailed, winning 3-0 in a game that saw Bankstown's goalkeeper Zlatko Josevski sent off for deliberate handball in the dying seconds.

The Eagles got off to a great start when Grant Bard netted after just three minutes, and when the talented Anthony Panzarino made it 2-0 on 27 it was always going to be a long haul for the Lions.

Bankstown were without four players who were playing for the Australian Lebanese team, and the Eagles made sure of victory when striker Adam Anderson came on and scored within two minutes of entering the field.

Parramatta Eagles — Holmes, Utjesenovic (Kelso), O'Grady, Revely, Panzarino, M. Mielak, Bard, Mittiga, Islas (Boskovski), Conde, Wakim (Anderson)

Bankstown City — Z Josevski, R Luksic, D Luksic, Hawrysiuk, Todorovski (Wilson), Adioski, Lozevski (Briskovski), Kipazirov, Van Bentum, Dimovski, Badrov (Nouh)

SUPER LEAGUE

FIRST GRADE:

Preliminary Semi Final - Blacktown City 3(D Smith 38/64m, A Holst 66m) bt Macarthur Rams 1(E Williams 79m)
Elimination Semi Final - Parramatta Eagles 3 (G Bard 3m, A Panzarino 27m, A Anderson 58m) bt Bankstown City 0.

UNDER 21: Elimination Semi Final - Blacktown City 0 drew Fairfield Bulls 0(3-1 Penalties)

Preliminary Semi Final - Macarthur Rams 2 bt Bonnyrigg White Eagles 1

UNDER 18: Elimination Semi Final - Canterbury M'Ville 3 drew Leichhardt Tigers 3(4-2 Penalties) Preliminary Semi Final -Blacktown City 1 drew Macarthur Rams 1(1-3 Penalties).

DIVISION ONE

FIRST GRADE: Moorebank Sports 1 bt Auburn United 0, Rockdale 3(S Najdoski 34/37/86m) bt Bathurst '75 0, Penrith Panthers 2 (Own goal 29m, R Astone 73m) bt Moorebank Sports 1 (A Lock 72m), St George 2 (A Araujo 37m, L Kohl 39m) drew Illawarra Lions 2 (J Melissourgos 89m, J Kenoevski 91m), Stanmore Hawks 4 (P Kypreos 40/82m, A Markopoulos 70m, S Bakafoukas 77m) bt Dulwich Hill 1 (M Sulton 87m), Auburn United 1 (A Kanaan 89m) bt Hurstville City 0, AC United 1 (F Screpes 37m) bt Manly Warringah 0.

UNDER 21: Rockdale City Suns 2 bt Bathurst '75 1, Penrith Panthers 4 bt Moorebank Sports 0, St George 9 bt Illawarra Lions 0, Dulwich Hill 1 bt Stanmore Hawks 0, Auburn United 3 bt Hurstville City 0, Manly Warringah 3 bt AC United 0.

UNDER 18: Bathurst '75 2 bt Rockdale City Suns 0, Penrith Panthers 3 bt Moorebank Sports 1, St George 3 bt Illawarra Lions 0, Stanmore Hawks 1 drew Dulwich Hill 1, Auburn United 3 bt Hurstville City 1, AC United 3 bt Manly Warringah 0.

DIVISION TWO

FIRST GRADE: Sydney University 0 drew Hills United 0, Hurstville ZSC 2 bt Belmore Hercules 0, Fraser Park 3 bt Greystanes 1, Hajduk Wanderers 3 bt Mt Druitt Town 0, University of NSW 2 bt Mt Pritchard 1, Arncliffe Scots 3 bt Sydney District 0. **UNDER 21:** Hills United 1 bt Sydney University 0, Hurstville ZSC 4 bt Belmore Hercules 0, Fraser Park 3 bt Greystanes 1, Hajduk Wanderers 2 bt Mt Druitt Town 1, Mt Pritchard 10 bt University of NSW 0, Arncliffe Scots 1 drew Sydney District 1.

UNDER 18: Hills United 7 bt Sydney University 1, Belmore Hercules 5 bt Hurstville ZSC 0, Fraser Park 0 drew Greystanes 0, Mt Druitt Town 5 bt Hajduk Wanderers 1, Mt Pritchard 3 bt University of NSW 0 (Win by Forfeit), Sydney District 3 bt Arncliffe Scots 2, Hills United 2 bt Hurstville ZSC 0.

DIVISION THREE:

FIRST GRADE: Liverpool City 2 bt Prospect United 0, Western Sydney Lions 1 bt Maroubra 0, The Wanderers 2 bt Hakoah 1, White City 2 bt Colo Colo 1, Trasandinos 6 bt Gladesville United 2, Camden Tigers 2 bt Parramatta City 1.

SECOND GRADE: Liverpool City 1 drew Prospect United 1, Maroubra United 2 bt Western Sydney Lions 0, Hakoah 3 bt The Wanderers 1, Colo Colo 5 bt White City 0, Trasandinos 5 bt Gladesville United 0, Camden Tigers 0 d Parramatta City 0.

DIVISION FOUR:

FIRST GRADE: Balmain 1 bt Nepean District 0, White Valley vs Marrickville P/P, CSI Schofields 3 bt Auburn Star 0, Granville Greenisland 2 bt Prairiewood United 1, Hawkesbury City 2 bt Holy Cross Ryde 1, Springwood 5 bt Eastern Creek Pioneers 1, United Eagles 6 bt Sydney Crescent Star 0, Springwood 4 bt Sydney Crescent Star 1.

SECOND GRADE: Nepean District 3 bt Balmain 1, Marrickville 4 bt White Valley 0, Auburn Star 2 bt CSI Schofields 1, Prairiewood United 4 bt Granville Greenisland 2, Holy Cross Ryde 3 bt Hawkesbury City 0, Springwood 4 bt Eastern Creek Pioneers 0, United Eagles 1 bt Sydney Crescent Star 13, Springwood 7 bt Sydney Crescent Star 1.

DIVISION FIVE

FIRST GRADE: Bossy 7 bt Macquarie Sports 1, Sporting SCC 2 bt AVA United 1, Kellyville Kolts 5 bt Earlwood Hermes 1, Kosciusko 4 bt Homenetmen 1, Sydney TUSC vs Sydney United Kings P/P, Liverpool Olympic 2 bt Lithgow Workmen 1.

SECOND GRADE: Bossy 5 bt Macquarie Sports 2, Sporting 3 bt AVA United 1, Kellyville Kolts 7 bt Earlwood Hermes 0, Kosciusko 3 bt Homenetmen 2, Sydney TUSC vs Sydney United Kings P/P, Lithgow Workmen 1 drew Liverpool Olympic 1.

WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

FIRST GRADE: Sutherland Sharks 3 bt Central Coast 0,

Marconi Fairfield 3 bt Sydney United 0, NSW INST/Academy 7 bt Gladesville Ravens 1, UWS Macarthur Rams 2 bt Shoalhaven Assoc 0.

SECOND GRADE: Sutherland Sharks 3 bt Central Coast 0, Marconi Fairfield 2 bt Sydney United 0, Gladesville Ravens 0 drew NSW INST/Academy 0, UWS Macarthur Rams 1 bt Shoalhaven Assoc 0.

WOMENS STATE LEAGUE:

FIRST GRADE: Manly Warringah 3 bt Gladesville Hornsby Koalas 0, Bathurst City 1 bt Eastern Suburbs 0, Wollongong Wolves 3 bt St George Assoc 1, Roselands 1 drew Bankstown United 1.

SECOND GRADE: Manly Warringah 13 bt Gladesville Hornsby Koalas 0, Bathurst City 3 bt Eastern Suburbs 1, St George Assoc 2 bt Wollongong Wolves 1, Roselands 6 bt Bankstown United 0.

SUPER YOUTH LEAGUE:

UNDER 13: Leichhardt Tigers vs Southern Branch W/O, Gladesville Hornsby 2 bt Central Coast 0, Parramatta Eagles 1 drew Newcastle Breakers 1, Sydney United 1 drew Southern Districts 1, Wollongong Wolves 2 drew Macarthur Rams 2, Sydney Olympic 4 bt Eastern Suburbs 0, Blacktown City 5 bt Marconi Fairfield 1, Sutherland Sharks 2 bt Manly Warringah 0.

UNDER 14: Leichhardt Tigers vs Southern Branch W/O, Gladesville Hornsby 5 bt Central Coast 0, Parramatta Eagles 3 bt Newcastle Breakers 1, Sydney United 2 drew Southern Districts 2, Macarthur Rams 1 bt Wollongong Wolves 1, Sydney Olympic 2 bt Eastern Suburbs 1, Blacktown City 3 bt Marconi Fairfield 2, Sutherland Sharks 1 bt Manly Warringah 0.

UNDER 15: Leichhardt Tigers 3 bt Southern Branch 0, Gladesville Hornsby 2 bt Central Coast 1, Newcastle Breakers 2 bt Parramatta eagles 0, Southern Districts 1 bt Sydney United 0, Macarthur Rams 2 bt Wollongong Wolves 0, Eastern Suburbs 2 bt Sydney Olympic 1, Marconi Fairfield 1 drew Blacktown City 1, Sutherland Sharks 2 bt Manly Warringah 1.

UNDER 16: Leichhardt Tigers 5 bt Southern Branch 0, Newcastle Breakers 1 bt Parramatta eagles 0, Southern Districts 2 bt Sydney United 1, Wollongong Wolves 5 bt Macarthur Rams 1, Sydney Olympic 1 bt Eastern Suburbs 0, Blacktown City 4 bt Marconi Fairfield 0, Sutherland Sharks 4 bt Manly Warringah 1.

DIVISION ONE YOUTH LEAGUE:

UNDER 13: St George vs Canterbury M'Ville W/O, Bonnyrigg White Eagles 4 drew Bankstown Association 4, Illawarra Lions 2 bt Blacktown Association 1, Ryde City 1 drew AC United 1, Fairfield Bulls 3 bt Stanmore Hawks 0, Penrith Panthers 3 bt Hills United 0, Canterbury Association 3 bt Rockdale City Suns 2. **UNDER 14:** St George vs Canterbury M'Ville W/O, Bonnyrigg White Eagles 3 bt Bankstown Association 2, Illawarra Lions 3 bt Blacktown Association 2, Ryde City 2 bt AC United 0, Stanmore Hawks 1 bt Fairfield Bulls 0, Penrith Panthers 1 bt Hills United 0, Canterbury Association 1 bt Rockdale City Suns 0. **UNDER 15:** St George vs Canterbury M'Ville W/O, Bonnyrigg White Eagles 2 bt Bankstown Association 0, Blacktown Association 3 bt Illawarra Lions 0, AC United 1 bt Ryde City 0, Fairfield Bulls 2 drew Stanmore Hawks 2, Hills United 0 drew Penrith Panthers 0, Canterbury Association 2 bt Rockdale City Suns 0.

UNDER 16: St George vs Canterbury M'Ville W/O, Bankstown Association 2 bt Bonnyrigg White Eagles 1, Illawarra Lions 4 bt Blacktown Association 0, Ryde City 2 drew AC United 2, Stanmore Hawks 2 bt Fairfield Bulls 0, Penrith Panthers 2 bt Hills United 1, Canterbury Association 1 bt Rockdale City Suns 0.

DIVISION TWO YOUTH LEAGUE:

UNDER 13: Nepean Association 2 bt Moorebank Sports 0, Macquarie Sports 2 bt Hawkesbury City 1, Camden Tigers 0 drew Granville Association 0, Mt Pritchard 2 bt Parramatta City 0, Mt Druitt Town 2 bt CSI Schofields 1, Ku-Ring-Gai Association 2 bt Hajduk Wanderers 1.

UNDER 14: Nepean Association 7 bt Moorebank Sports 0, Hawkesbury City 5 bt Macquarie Sports 1, Camden Tigers 1 bt Granville Association 0, Parramatta City 2 bt Mt Pritchard 1, Mt Druitt Town 1 bt CSI Schofields 0, Ku-Ring-Gai Association 2 bt Hajduk Wanderers 1.

UNDER 15: Nepean Association 2 bt Moorebank Sports 1, Macquarie Sports 2 bt Hawkesbury City 0, Camden Tigers 1 bt Granville Association 0, Parramatta City City 2 bt Mt Pritchard 1, Mt Druitt Town 2 bt CSI Schofields 0, Hajduk Wanderers 4 bt Ku-Ring-Gai Association 3.

UNDER 16: Nepean Association 6 bt Moorebank Association 0, Hawkesbury City 3 bt Macquarie Sports 0, Camden Tigers 3 bt Granville Association 0, Parramatta City 2 drew Mt Pritchard 2, Mt Druitt Town 2 bt CSI Schofields 0, Ku-Ring-Gai Association 3 bt Hajduk Wanderers 2.

NSW SOCCER FEDERATION SUPER LEAGUE

SEMI



FINALS

Saturday 17 July

First Grade: Macarthur Rams v Parramatta Eagles
Serbian Centre 5.00pm

Under 21's: Macarthur Rams v Parramatta Eagles
Serbian Centre 2.30pm

Under 18's: Macarthur Rams v Parramatta Eagles
Serbian Centre 12.30pm

First Grade: Bonnyrigg WE v Blacktown City
Melita Stadium 5.00pm

Under 21's: Bonnyrigg WE v Blacktown City
Melita Stadium 2.30pm

Under 18's: Blacktown City v Canterbury
Marrickville
Melita Stadium 12.30pm

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SOCCER CANBERRA

You're Only As Old As You Feel - After The Game

By Greg Welsh

It's a frosty Sunday morning in Canberra's outer suburbs. Fifteen men, all aged somewhere between 35 and 50, stand around and talk football, each comment producing its own little cloud of steam. A familiar sight perhaps, at least at first glance. But these men aren't discussing their children's games or reliving former glories, they're talking tactics.

The group, as members of the University of Canberra Union Soccer Club, participate in an increasingly competitive and popular sport - Master's soccer.

Vince Taglieri, the team's right fullback as well as club president, believes the over-35's Masters compe-

titions will go from strength to strength as more clubs provide a vehicle for the game's veterans to remain involved as participants.

"To be honest, I think it's probably the only competition that's going to continue to expand," Taglieri says. "You'll have growth in women's soccer and you'll have continued growth in juniors, but there's been a long period of time when there's been nothing catering for the older player."

Masters soccer has been run in Canberra for the past seven years, with the Uni fielding a side during each of the last four seasons.

"The first two years we were absolutely

we're obviously playing okay suppose."

"Okay" seems a little bit of an understatement when you look at Uni's record this year. They've played 13 games without a loss, and yet find themselves just one point clear of Canberra City at the top of the ladder.

Today they're pitted against 9th placed Belconnen United, who proved during the first round confrontation they'd be far from easy beats.

However the game is only three minutes old when Uni captain Carl Marshall curls a long-range effort into the Belconnen goal, and eight minutes later a rout looks likely when striker Peter Lunn intercepts a Belconnen goal-kick and unselfishly lays-off for Carl Wicken to score. But the goal seems

to infuriate the Belconnen side like a beast awakened from its early-morning slumber, and they strike back within the minute. Midfielder Alan Joe dribbles towards the right byline, then cuts the ball square behind the Uni defence to allow forward Alan Wood to finish from closer range.

For the next twenty minutes the game is evenly poised, with Marshall perhaps having the best chance when he finds himself with only Belconnen goalkeeper Kevin O'Donnell to beat. However the keeper comes out well and manages to touch Marshall's shot over the crossbar.

Once again Belconnen seems affronted by the attack, and hits back immediately. This time Mal Potts dispossesses Uni midfielder Michael Imholz before unleashing a swerving drive which unerringly finds the top left corner of the Uni net.

Despite the scores being

level at the break it's Belconnen who now have the ascendancy, and they pull ahead with Potts' second goal six minutes into the second half.

The teams continue to slug it out for the next twenty minutes before a piece of absolute brilliance from Belconnen playmaker Steve Foreshaw gives the underdogs the crucial two-goal advantage.

The central midfielder, located a good twenty-five yards out from goal, takes one touch to control the ball and another to send it curling into the top left-hand corner of the Uni net, leaving keeper Graham Murphy no chance.

To their credit, Uni then play some of their best football, but despite pulling back a goal when Gerry Lenaghan crosses to an unmarked Lunn at the back post, it's a case of "too little too late" for the favourites, their unbeaten streak now at an end.

"We didn't play with the

same amount of enthusiasm as the last couple of weeks," Taglieri says. "And Belconnen played really well, they stuck to their guns. They weathered the storm in the first twenty minutes and snagged a couple of really good goals and then I think that was it, we were under the hammer after that."

The Uni players conduct a prolonged post-mortem around the esky after the match, but the disappointment is balanced by good dose of self-deprecating humour and a similar amount of realism.

"While you're on the park you play as hard as you can for as long as you can," Taglieri notes, "[but] we all enjoy a beer at the end of the game, most of the teams do. I think that's what it's all about at that age."

These players are willing to accept the three-day recovery period after matches as a trade-off for continued involvement in the game they love.

SOCCER ILLAWARRA

The 15th round of the Illawarra Credit Union Premier League promises to be an exciting one with the match between the third and fourth placed teams, Coniston Lions and Kemblawarra, headlining the games.

Kemblawarra vs Shoalhaven City at Butler Memorial Park, 5th vs 9th placed, on paper the home side should win this match but cannot afford to take the visitors for granted since they have proved their resilience in their earlier encounter, the home side has to be cautious and show good form to succeed as the first game saw a narrow win by Kemblawarra.

Coniston Lions vs Bulli at J.J. Kelly, 4th vs 3rd, promises a tight match, the home team having won the first meeting but could find it much tougher this time with the Bulli team going well lately, consistently improving as shown by their position on the table.

Cringila Lions vs Northern United at Crehan Park, the top of the table

visitors looking for a win after losing two matches in a row but could meet strong a challenge from the home side who surprised one of the title contenders recently. An upset is a distinct possibility and the first meeting was a close game.

Wollongong Olympic vs Woonona at No. 2 Brandon Park, 6th vs 11th, with Olympic having won their previous game they should be able to secure the points again.

Port Kembla vs Lysaghts at Wetherall Park, with the first match a clear success for the Port boys, another win for the home side is expected particularly in view of their last two wins. The home team looks too tough for the visitors who have dropped off the pace in recent matches and are missing injured sweeper Mike Hollyfield..

The first White Eagles vs Fernhill encounter at Brandon Park produced a 4:4 thriller which surely will not be repeated, the home side having improved while the visitors are struggling to avoid relegation and must show better form to

surprise the host.

After the weekend's games the tight competition table sees Northern United still leading followed by Port Kembla and Bulli.

The third placed Bulli is still only one win away from the top spot and with nine rounds still to play there are at least three teams in the running for the championship.

Even the fourth placed Coniston is only six points from the lead and by no means out of contention.

The weekend's results went in accordance to the positions on the table with no major upsets.

The match of the round between the first and fourth placed team proved to be a bruising affair with Northern coming on top narrowly 1-0

The only minor upset in the round was the heavy defeat inflicted upon Wollongong White Eagles by Wollongong Olympic, who now find themselves only one point behind White Eagles and within sight of the top four.

Bulli achieved a significant victory over fifth placed Kemblawarra to remain only three points from the lead.

PREMIER LEAGUE ROUND 14 RESULTS

Bulli	3	Kemblawarra	1
Northern United	1	Coniston	0
Shoalhaven City	1	Port Kembla	2
Lysaghts	3	Fernhill	1
White Eagles	0	Wollongong Olympic	4
Woonona	1	Cringila	1

Points Table: Northern United 32, Port Kembla 30, Bulli 29, Coniston 26, Kemblawarra 24, White Eagles 21, Wollongong Olympic 20, Lysaghts 19, Shoalhaven City 15, Cringila 12, Woonona 10, Fernhill 4.



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ILLAWARRA CREDIT UNION PREMIER LEAGUE ROUND 15

Kemblawarra v Shoalhaven - Butler Memorial Park

Coniston Lions v Bulli - J.J. Kelly Prk

Cringila Lions v Northern United - Crehan Park

Wollongong Olympic v Woonona - Brandon Park No 2

Port Kembla v Lysaghts - Wetherall Park

Wollongong White Eagles v Fernhill - Brandon Park

INSIDE JUNIOR SOCCER

More than 2,500 soccer enthusiasts flocked to Swan Hill at the weekend for the two day Victorian Country Soccer Association Junior Championships.

The monster event attracted about 800 players and 1500 parents and supporters. The host association was blessed with perfect weather conditions resulting in a highly entertaining play in all six divisions.

The Swan Hill Soccer Centre was transformed into a sea of colour with seven fields in operation.

Associations from all over Victoria including Geelong and Western Victoria, Gippsland, Albury-Wodonga, Cobram and Border Country, Bendigo, North-East Victoria,

Gippsland, Albury-Wodonga, North-Eastern and Bendigo were the most successful. However, VSF technical director Ian Greener maintained that the



Ballarat, Echuca-Moama and Swan Hill were represented.

Results of the Victorian Country Junior Championships:

Under 11: Gippsland	3	Albury Wodonga	0
Under 12: Albury Wodonga	2	Gippsland	1
Under 13: Gippsland	1	North East	0
Under 14: Gippsland	1	North East	0
Under 15: Bendigo	2	North East	1
Under 16: Gippsland	2	Albury Wodonga	1

smaller associations were closing the gap on the traditionally more successful regions. He felt that he had witnessed a great many closely fought encounters over the weekend.

Greener and a host of talent identification scouts from the VSF had been

in attendance for the weekend with many players set to come under further notice after strong performances.

The host association's organising committee led by the very hard-working Mike Knudsen had provided a true carnival atmosphere where all

participants were winners in a spirit of true sportsmanship and camaraderie.

***Send in your stories and pics (like this youngster with Harry K in Canberra recently) for Inside Junior Soccer**



USA WORLD CHAMPIONS ... JUST

You could say it was naked emotion when US team player Brandi Chastain took her shirt off to celebrate winning the World Cup final after her penalty secured the title, in a shootout, for the holders.

"Momentary insanity," Chastain said after the Americans beat China 5-4 in the shootout following a 0-0 tie on Saturday. "I just lost my mind. I thought, my god, this is the greatest moment of my life on the soccer field."

Chastain's shot won the Women's World Cup for the team that captured America with its style and grace, and now has conquered the world.

"I didn't hear any noise. I didn't get caught up looking at Gao Hong," Chastain said, referring to China's goalkeeper. "I just put it home."

And with Briana Scurry's one save in the shootout, it was enough for the U.S. team to bring home the most prestigious trophy in soccer before the largest crowd ever to see a women's game.

"I knew I had to stop just one and my teammates would put all of them in," said Scurry, who stopped Liu Ying on the third attempt in the shootout. "I went totally on instinct."

Chastain (right), who was cut from the national squad in 1994 and had to work her way back onto it, posed for *Gear Magazine* in June with nothing but a strategically placed soccer ball hiding her naked body. This time, she revealed a black sports bra as she and her teammates leapt on one another in celebration.

"When we win, it means all of America wins. They so much epitomize what America is all about."

When they won, the players jumped about with whatever energy they had left following two hours of exhausting soccer and then the tension-filled shootout. And after they received their championship medals, they jogged around the field carrying three huge American flags as the fans roared and chanted "U-S-A, U-S-A."

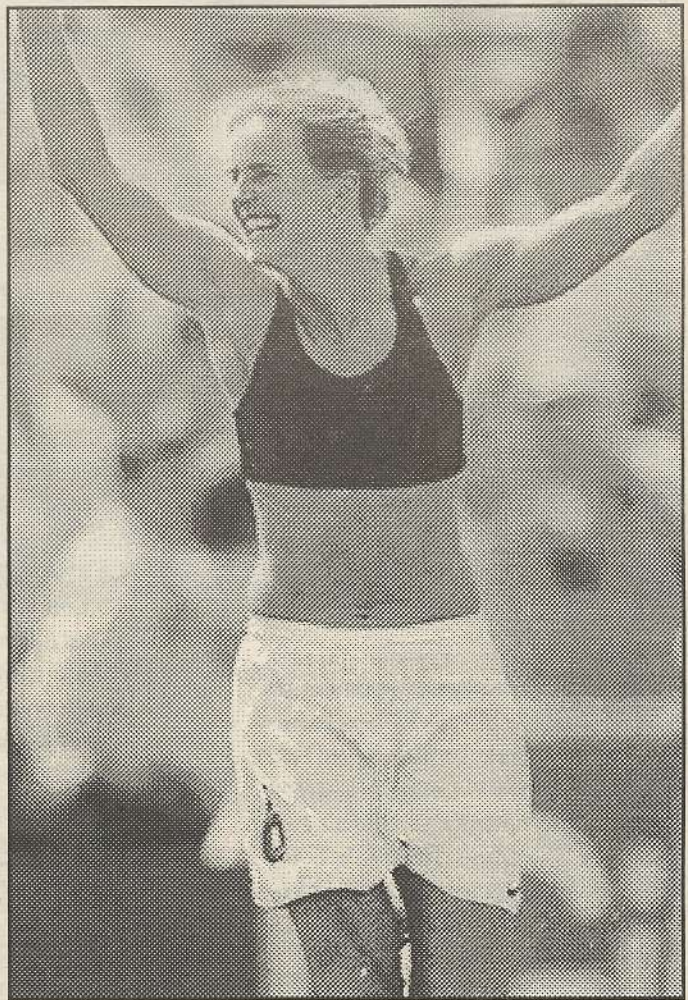
Both teams stood hand-in-hand for

photos after sharing one of the most intense experiences in sports — a shootout to decide a World Cup crown. Coincidentally, the men's World Cup final in 1994 at the Rose Bowl ended in a shootout after a 0-0 tie, with Brazil beating Italy.

China shot first and Xie Huilin hit the left corner of the net. Co-captain Carla Overbeck matched the goal to a huge cheer from the crowd.

Qiu Haiyan barely got the ball past the outstretched hands of a diving Scurry, and Joy Fawcett made no mistake with her shot for 2-2.

Brandi Chastain gave the shirt off her back to put the U.S. over the top with her penalty kick. AP



Liu's shot was in the middle of the net and Scurry got her hands on it to send it wide. Kristine Lilly then almost nonchalantly put hers in.

Zhang Ouying beat Scurry, but Mia Hamm scored. That brought Sun Wen, the tournament's leading scorer, to the spot with the crowd in a frenzy. Sun put her shot to the left of Scurry for 4-4.

Then came Chastain.

"Dave Letterman told me to have her take one," DiCicco said.

Another savior was Lilly. In the 100th minute, in 90-degree heat, a header by Fan Yunjie was headed off the goal line by Lilly with Scurry beaten. The crowd sighed, then roared at Lilly's championship-saving play.

"Kristine filled her role on that play," Chastain said. "She was where she had to be and made the play she had to make."

Another star was Michelle Akers, at 33 the oldest of the Americans. She left the game with an injury in the final moments of regulation. When she played, she dominated the midfield, never allowing Sun to threaten.

China's brilliant midfielder, Yan Jin, finally got going when Akers left. She created several chances in the extra periods, when China had a big edge.

Clearly the two best teams in the tournament — China outscored opponents 19-2 and the United States had an 18-3 margin — these teams have created a scintillating rivalry.

The Americans beat the Chinese 2-1 for the 1996 Olympics gold medal and 2-0 for the '98 Goodwill Games crown. China had won two of three this year, including the championship of the prestigious Algarve Cup.

But the big one went to the Americans, and the series now stands 12-5-5 for the United States, which also won the first World Cup in China in 1991.

The fans arrived early and ready. By halftime of the third-place game, won by Brazil on penalty kicks, the stands were nearly filled. Just about everywhere youngsters with red-white-and-blue painted faces waved American flags. Chants of "U-S-A, U-S-A" began even as Norway and Brazil were playing.

When the American team marched onto the field, Akers jumped up and down like a schoolgirl as her teammates waved their arms above their heads and encouraged more cheering from a crowd already screaming its lungs out.

The wave of sound, punctuated by a U.S. Navy F-18 fly-over at the conclusion of the national anthem, was deafening.

But there wasn't much to cheer about for most of the sloppy game.

Neither goalie was tested much, and the crowd's biggest reaction of regulation time was when the crowd booed as Clinton was shown on the scoreboard.

"I think the whole country was caught up in this, not only fans of soccer but young girls," Clinton said. "In some ways, it's the biggest sporting event of the last decade. It's new and exciting for the United States. It will have a very far-reaching impact, not only for the United States, but for the world."

President Clinton joined thousands of soccer-crazed fans watching the United States defeat China in Saturday's finals of the women's World Cup, proclaiming it an "amazing" day.

"It was the most exciting sports event I have ever seen," Clinton told the U.S. women's team in their locker room after the game. "I cannot thank you enough for the gift you have given the United States."

Sporting yellow championship T-shirts, the players jumped up and down and chanted "U.S.A" as they posed for pictures with actors Arsenio Hall and Edward James Olmos before Clinton arrived.

Clinton told the women their winning performance in the double-overtime, penalty-kick shootout match was a lesson in "courage and endurance."

"It was an amazing day," Clinton said. "We learned a lot today about soccer and about women athletes."

Clinton was accompanied by California Gov. Gray Davis, political adviser James Carville, brother Roger Clinton and his family, Hollywood producers and Arkansas friends Harry Thomason and Linda Bloodworth-Thomason and Christian Correy, the husband of American player Mia Hamm. Correy is a Marine based near San Diego.

"It's a wonderful thing for the world," Clinton said at halftime. "I think it's going to have a bigger impact than most people even realize."

Later, Clinton also greeted the Chinese team in their locker room. The players there crowded around him with their cameras and video recorders and lingered to have their pictures snapped with the president of the United States.

"I wanted to say to the whole team how much we admired your performance in the whole World Cup," Clinton told the Chinese team through an interpreter.

As White House staffers began to herd the press away, Clinton shouted them to call photographers back for one pose with the entire Chinese squad.

Clinton told reporters later he had told the Chinese, "We were very honored to have them in the United States."

The president ended a cross-country poverty tour on Thursday, but decided to remain on the West Coast for the championship game at the Rose Bowl. He headed back to the White House after the game, scheduling a post-midnight arrival.

The U.S. players invited the president to attend after Clinton, his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea saw a quarterfinal game last week outside Washington as the Americans defeated Germany to advance to the semifinals. The U.S. women later beat Brazil to move to the finals.

Neither the first lady nor Chelsea attended Saturday's game.



SINGAPORE'S S-LEAGUE: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

With so many overseas and Aussie players (Tapai and David Cervinski to name just two), the Singapore S-League is an interesting conglomeration of players and style. Here is a brief history of what has been happening over there since the league started up three years ago ...

The Beginning...

On 12th December 1994, the Singapore national soccer team (or the Lions, as they are affectionately known to the fans) captured the coveted Malaysia Cup after a lapse of 14 years. An 80,000 crowd was at the Shah Alam Stadium to witness the event, as a hat trick from Sydney United's Abbas Saad and a goal from Fandi Ahmad enabled the Lions to beat Pahang 4-0.

In February 1995, however, the ecstasy was over. The Football Association of Singapore (FAS) made the shocking but necessary decision by announcing its intention to pull out from the Malaysia Cup competition, thus ending its 75-year association.

Shortly after the decision, the FAS set up a task force to study the feasibility of setting up a professional football league in Singapore.

In less than a year, the task force released its blueprint for the new league, in which they envisioned a start of eight teams, each based in a regional stadium. The FAS accepted the recommendations of the Task Force Committee and within four months, a company was formed to put the plans into action. That company is Singapore Professional Football League Private Limited.

Mr Kwek Leng Joo, a well known local businessman and the then national coach Mr. Douglas Moore were ap-

pointed respectively as the Chairman of the S-League's Board of Directors and the Chief Executive Officer.

14th April 1996

A date to be remembered, for the S-League was officially launched by the Prime Minister, Mr. Goh Chok Tong at the Kallang National Stadium. A gallery of 55,000 witnessed this historic event in Singapore soccer.

A friendly match between a S-League All-Star selection and the Thai national team was held to commemorate the event. The Thais won the match on penalty shoot-out after the game had ended in a 1-1 draw

The eight teams — Balestier Central FC, Geylang United FC, Police FC, Sembawang Rangers FC, Singapore Armed Forces FC, Tampines Rovers FC, Tiong Bahru United FC, Woodlands Wellington FC — were to compete in a two series competition (Tiger Beer Series and Pioneer Series). A finale match between the winners of the two series will then decide the eventual champion.

1996 Tiger Beer Series

The first matches were played on the 20th of April 1996 with Balestier Central's Bosnians import Esad Sedjic scoring the very first goal of the league against Police FC at Toa Payoh Stadium.

Sedjic was also credited with scoring the league's first hat trick, when he hit three past Sembawang Rangers at the same venue three days later. The biggest crowd of the league thus far was when 28,000 paying fans

witnessed a top-of-table clash between perennial powerhouse Geylang United and "New Kids On the Block" Woodlands Wellington at the National Stadium. Ervin Boban scored the only goal as Woodlands Wellington defeated Geylang United 1-0.

The two teams met again at the same venue in June 1996, with Geylang United clinching the Tiger Beer series title after a 1-1 draw.

1996 Pioneer Series

Compared to its predecessor, the Pioneer Series was a rather dull affair both in terms of media attention and fans' interests.

The only spice of this whole series was the emergence of Singapore Armed Forces FC

In rather remarkable fashion, the Warriors captured the Pioneer series championship without losing a single game!

1996: The Grand Final

9th November 1996 marked the day when the Grand Final of the first S-League season was to be played. Geylang United beat SAFFC, the newly crowned Pioneer series champion, 3-0 in front of 20,000 at the National Stadium. A week later, the Geylang Eagles made it a "double" by winning the FA Cup by beating the same opponents.

A restructuring of the competition took place, with the discarding of the 2-series format in favor of a single series. A League Cup competition, which climaxed later towards the knockout stages, was also introduced.

1997 Tiger Beer League Cup

The nine teams were split into three groups and each team had to play against the other two teams in the same group, on a home-and-away basis. Only the group winners and the best runner-up could make it to the semi-finals. In the end, only SAFFC, Tampines Rovers, Geylang United and Tiong Bahru United survived the preliminary rounds.

And so the Final featured the same teams as the 1996 season's Grand Final. The differences was that ex-Eagles Fandi Ahmad and Robin Chitrakar had both switched from to SAFFC and more importantly, the Warriors were also victorious this time round, adding the League Cup to the league title won earlier.

1998: A Year of Mixed Fortunes

On the international scene, the national soccer team won its first honors in a regional competition, by clinching the Tiger Cup in Vietnam.

On the domestic front, ex-SAFFC team manager LTC Chris Chan took over Douglas Moore as the new CEO of the S-League, with Douglas joining Geylang United as the head coach.

But sadly, the financial crisis hit the local football scene, with some teams failing to secure a main sponsor and others facing a drastic cut in sponsorship funds. Jurong FC was the hardest hit, its disagreement with main sponsor Jurong Reptile Park leading eventually to the club severing ties with the sponsor.

Another club, Marine Castle United (which made a second successful bid to join the League) was almost denied yet again, after it failed to secure a sponsor in time. Fortunately for the club, the matter was resolved just days before the kick-off. Together with Gombak United, the two clubs were the new entrants in the 11-team competition.

On the field, SAFFC retained its league title and finished ahead of Tanjong Pagar United, on the virtue of a superior goal-difference. The Warriors will have to thank their lucky stars though, for it was Nazri Nasir's goal-line clearance in the dying seconds of their final game that ensured a 1-0 victory over Gombak.

Still, the Jaguars were undeterred to have their fair share of the glory. Led by their new coach, former national player Tohari Paijan (who replaced Roberts Alberts after the Dutch moved over to Home United), Tanjong Pagar claimed the remaining silver wares — the Tiger Beer Singapore Cup and the FA Cup.

****For more info on the S-League log on to www.sleague.com.**

IN OTHER NEWS ...

the 30-year-old Iran international, Mohammad Khakpour, is now playing in, of all places, the USA. New York-New Jersey MetroStars is the new home for the former Pirouzi and Geylang United (S-League) defender who is expected to join the team by the end of this month. Mohammad Khakpour was one of the players who helped dump the Socceroos out of a spot in the World Cup. The Major League Soccer outfit announced that it has also acquired fiery Yugoslav international attacking midfielder Sasa Curcic, formerly of Crystal Palace, Aston Villa and Bolton. Curcic will link up with fellow Serb Bora Milutinovic. The much-travelled MetroStars coach who steered the US national side to the second phase of the 1994 World Cup. Khakpour was a regular at France '98 for Iran, and starred in their win over the United States. He recently trained with the Los Angeles Galaxy and has won more than 20 caps for his country.

BARCA SAY NO TO SHIRT SPONSORS

Barcelona were looking at the possibility of signing a shirt sponsorship deal for the first time in their history, a Spanish newspaper reported on Thursday. This however was ruled out.

In a move that is sure to raise hackles within the 100-year-old club, Barcelona are reported to have contracted the company International Sports Group to assess a possible deal.

Barcelona have never had a regular shirt sponsor, although they did once carry an advertisement for Japan Airlines when on a Japanese Tour in 1990. The current Barcelona shirt carries a large club badge above a discreet Nike logo, the sportswear manufacturer that makes the shirts. If Barcelona were to go ahead with a deal it would leave Athletic Bilbao as the only first division team in Spain without shirt sponsorship.

Dutch Justice Minister Benk Korthals wants to tighten anti-hooligan laws ahead of Euro 2000 to allow courts to detain suspected troublemakers for up to 12 days.

Under current legislation, soccer fans charged with public order offences are freed ahead of their trial on condition of good behaviour.

Korthals wants to enable judges to lock up even minor offenders if they believe there is a significant risk of further trouble. The Dutch cabinet is expected to discuss the proposal at its weekly meeting later this week.

The cabinet has already approved legislation that would allow police to hold groups of suspected troublemakers for up to 12 hours. That law must still be passed by parliament.

Colombian forward Faustino Asprilla has left Parma to join Brazil's Palmeiras, the Italian club said. They gave no details of Asprilla's transfer fee nor of his contract with the South American champions. Asprilla failed to hold down a first team place last season after returning to Parma from English premier league Newcastle. He won the UEFA Cup and Cup Winners' Cup in his first spell with the northern Italian club between 1992 and 1996 and made a fleeting appearance in Parma's UEFA Cup winning side in May.

Brazilian international defender Cesar has joined Paris St Germain from Sao Paulo club Portuguesa, the French side said. The centre-back, currently with Brazil's Copa America squad in Paraguay, signed a five-year contract in a deal worth an estimated 32 million francs (\$5.3 million). The capture of the defender, full name Cesar Augusto Belli Michelin, maintained PSG's traditional link with Brazil and was achieved with the help of their former captain Rai. Cesar began his professional career with Ponte Preta in 1993 before joining Portuguesa two years later.

SUPER EAGLE IKPEBA DEBUTS FOR DORTMUND

Strikers Fredi Bobic and Victor Ikpeba made their debut for Borussia Dortmund when the 1997 European champions played Hertha Berlin in the German League Cup on Sunday.

Bobic and Nigeria's Ikpeba, who joined from VfB Stuttgart and Monaco respectively, will sport their new colours for the first time in the traditional pre-season tournament featuring six teams — the top five in last season's Bundesliga standings and German Cup winners Werder Bremen.

Many have said these tournaments place too much pressure on players, but the response is that they all get a break during the Christmas and January period, when, in Germany in particular, the weather is too cold and snowy to play games.

Dortmund finished fourth in the league, just one spot below Hertha. Both clubs will enter the qualifying round of the Champions League.

Runners-up Bayer Leverkusen featured Sergio, formerly with AS Roma, and promising teenage striker Roque Santa Cruz of Paraguay.

The German first division championship resumes on August 13.

Arsenal paid just pounds 500,000 to capture 17-year-old Nicolas Anelka from Paris St Germain two years ago. Now they will use the massive profit to land a replacement forward, with Liverpool's Robbie Fowler and the Brazilian Christian of Palmeiras in Wenger's sights.

The Arsenal boss has warned life will be very different for Anelka in Rome, even though the youngster has complained about criticism and adverse press coverage in England.

He said: "He was not a big gamble here. But if he is transferred to Italy for a big fee there will be much greater expectations."

And with Italy's voracious media scrutinizing his every move, the English tabloids may seem rather tame in comparison, especially if he does not score goals like his predecessor, Vieri did.

INTER'S RONALDO IN THE HALL OF FAME

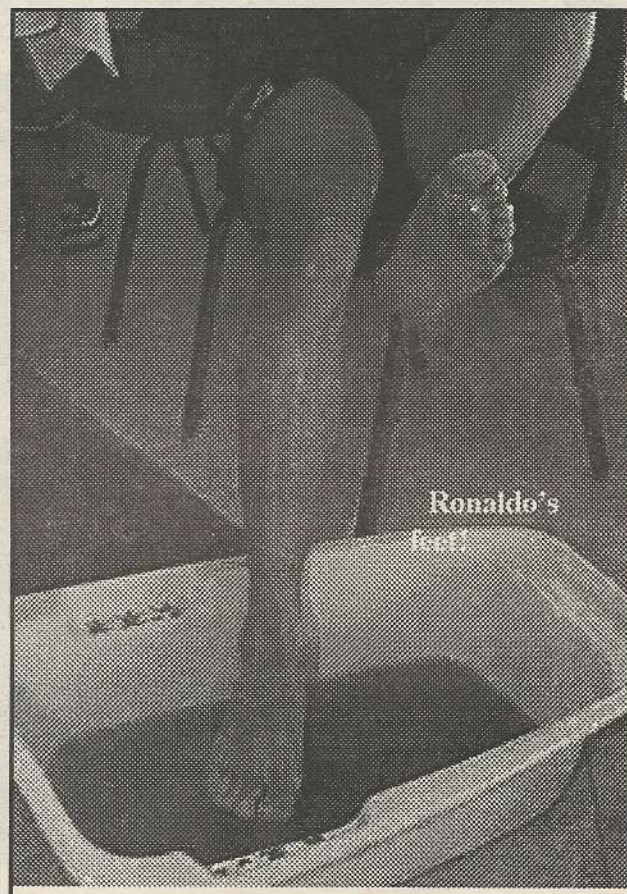
Greek champions Olympiakos have signed Barcelona's Brazilian World Cup midfielder Giovanni on a three-year contract worth around \$6.13 million. "The deal is done after marathon negotiations with Barcelona. We expect him to arrive in Athens this week," an Olympiakos official said.

Giovanni was among nine players told by Barcelona coach Louis van Gaal last month that they were no longer part of his plans. He joined the Spanish champions from Santos in the 1996 close season but spent much of this season on the bench after falling out with van Gaal.

Monaco defender Djibril Diawara has joined promoted serie A side Torino, the Italian club said. Torino said Diawara, born in Senegal, had signed a four-year contract but did not reveal the transfer fee.

New Mallorca coach Mario Gomez arrived on the Balearic island on Thursday to begin what he described as the toughest challenge of his career. The 46-year-old Argentine has the unenviable task of following Hector Cuper, the Valencia-bound coach who in two seasons transformed Mallorca from relegation favourites to championship contenders and European finalists. Gomez, like Cuper, is coming into the job after a spell as boss of Argentine club Lanus and recognises that his predecessor will be a tough act to follow.

And finally, Christian Vieri's new pal Ronaldo was inducted into a South American Hall of Fame. The legs you see on your right are of the Ron-meister washing his feet after he placed them in concrete for the said H of F. (well you know what he looks like).



GREEDY PLAYERS UNDER REAL ATTACK FROM EL PRESIDENT

The debate over players and their greedy financial demands is starting to gain momentum in Europe. Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz has hit out at the mercenary attitude of players in the modern game — and a lack of genuine “Madridistas” among his own squad.

Sanz told El Mundo newspaper there were only four players currently at Real who really felt something for the distinguished club.

The rest, he said, were just there for the money.

“Footballers tend to think of themselves, which is logical,” Sanz was reported as saying. “Their careers are short and they’re looking for the maximum return.

“But things have changed. Players these days may arrive at their teams with excitement but they don’t really feel anything for the clubs.

“At the moment there are only four players — at the absolute maximum — who really feel for this club.

“The players come here to do their job and get paid. The majority of them would leave if there was a better offer on the table. There’s nothing you can do about that.”

In the UK, Derby manager Jim Smith has labelled the agents of players as ‘spivs’ (see story in this issue).

Is there too much money sloshing around the game? Certainly in Europe it would appear so as a club contract seems to be worth very little these days. The story below, concerning Mario Basler is further evidence of clubs trying to stamp out rampant greed from our players, sportsmen who have been made very rich people thanks to the Bosman ruling and the influx of TV money into the game.

Mercurial midfielder Mario Basler has to accept Bayern Munich’s conditions if he wants to stay, club vice-president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge was quoted as saying.

“Mario is going the wrong way,” Rummenigge told Sunday newspaper Bild am Sonntag in an interview released ahead of publication. “We will not change our salary structure for any player.”

Basler, 30, has turned down terms to stay on with the European Cup finalists and has asked to be paid as much as midfield colleague Stefan Effenberg.

According to Bild am Sonntag, Germany’s richest club pay Effenberg some 6 million marks (\$3.14 million) a year.

“Basler’s concep-

tions and Bayern’s are totally different at the moment,” said Rummenigge. “I can’t understand Mario.

“There will always be times when players do not accept their club’s conditions,” he added. “It happened with Ziege and Nerlinger. When that’s the case, the players must take the consequences.”

Defender Christian Ziege and defensive midfielder Christian Nerlinger both left Bayern and now play for AC Milan and Borussia Dortmund respectively.

Rummenigge confirmed in the interview that Germany defender Markus Babel, who had been approached by Spaniards Real Madrid and English premier league side Liverpool, would still be with Bayern next season. Babel is now expected to join Liverpool from the 2000/1 season.

Bayern have made two spectacular signings in Paraguayan teenage striker Roque Santa Cruz from Olimpia Asuncion and Brazilian midfielder Paulo Sergio, formerly with AS Roma.

Italian Gianni Carnevale has been appointed coach of Georgian premier division side Dynamo Batumi, a club official said on Saturday.

Carnevale followed Dutchman Johan Boskamp, who became Georgia’s first foreign soccer coach when he took charge of champions Dynamo Tbilisi and the national team two months ago.

Batumi finished second in the league and won the Georgian Cup in 1998 but dropped to fifth this year.

The new season starts in the second week of August.

BAYER LEV WIN IN GERMAN CUP

Newcomers Thomas Brdaric and Bernd Schneider helped Bayer Leverkusen to a 3-1 victory over Kaiserslautern in the German League Cup on Saturday. Striker Brdaric, who joined the Bundesliga runners-up from second division Fortuna Cologne, scored from close range to level the tie at 1-1 in the 30th minute and midfielder Bernd Schneider, formerly with Eintracht Frankfurt, put his side 2-1 up seven minutes later.

Germany striker Ulf Kirsten completed Leverkusen’s victory with 12 minutes remaining from a fine pass by another new player, Brazilian striker Robson Ponte, on loan from Brazilian club Guarani.

Kaiserslautern opened the scoring through new signing Jorgen Pettersson of Sweden in the 16th minute.

Kirsten had missed a penalty for Leverkusen after just three minutes in the opening game in the traditional pre-season tournament featuring six teams — the top five in last season’s Bundesliga standings and German Cup winners Werder Bremen.

Champions Bayern and Bremen, who upset the Bavarians in the German Cup final, will enter the tournament from the semifinals this week.

Cameroon midfielder Geremi Njitap, a \$4.7 million buy from Genclerbirligi, will join ex-Liverpool midfielder Steve McManaman, Colombian international Edwin Congo, former Celta Vigo full back Michel Salgado and Ivan Helguera from Espanyol at the Bernabeu next season.

Real are also expected to sign Argentine centre back Mauricio Pochettino from Espanyol after their hopes of bringing in Markus Babel

founded, with the Bayern Munich player saying he preferred to wait for a move to Liverpool at the end of next season.

In a separate announcement, Real revealed that their players will, for the first time, be wearing black next season.

In a stark break with tradition at the “meringue” club, Real will wear black shirts in their away games in the Champions League next year.

Atletico Madrid have said they had received offers from two English clubs for their Brazilian midfielder Juninho.

Atletico managing director Miguel Angel Gil, son of president Jesus Gil, said he was confident a deal could be worked out for Juninho, who said this week he was ready to leave the club. “The two offers have been passed on to the player,” Gil said. “I’m sure a deal can be done between Atletico, Juninho and one of the clubs before the end of July.”

The two interested clubs are believed to be Middlesbrough, who sold the player to Atletico two years ago for 12.5 million pounds (\$19.71 million), and Aston Villa.

Juninho came close to a move back to England in January this year but was persuaded to stay by then coach Arrigo Sacchi. Atletico, who say they are prepared to spend as much as \$100 million on signings over the close season, would want around 2,500 millions pesetas (\$15.38 million) for Juninho, who has been disappointing in his two-year stay in Spain.

The Brazilian player spent most of his first season at the club in the sidelines, nursing a hamstring injury. In the second season he has spent at Atlético, the player fell below the club’s expectation, underperforming for the entirety of the current campaign.

Bulgarian ex-international Lyuboslav Penev has launched a campaign on to become president of his former club CSKA Sofia. Penev has spent the past decade playing in Spain. He joined Celta Vigo last August for \$2.3 million, making them his fourth Spanish club since 1989 after Atletico Madrid, Valencia and Compostela.

In the election on July 23, the 32-year-old striker will be challenging the club’s current president Iliya Pavlov, a former wrestler. Pavlov is also chairman of Multigroup corporation, which is CSKA’s sponsor. But local media say Penev has a good chance of winning as fans, veterans and the Defence Ministry, which controlled the club during the communist era, have pledged their support. CSKA have won the domestic league title 28 times and produced such players as Hristo Stoichkov and Emil Kostadinov, who helped guide Bulgaria to the World Cup semifinals in 1994. Precisely, Penev missed the 1994 World Cup finals campaign in the United States, in which the team were coached by his uncle Dimitar, because he had been undergoing treatment for a cancerous tumour.

He was dropped from the national side for using insulting words on television after the 1996 European championship finals in England during which he had also been dropped. Although he was later recalled he continued to have differences with the national soccer authorities.

He was a member of the squad at the 1998 World Cup finals in France where he went again into trouble, along with Stoichkov, for going absent from the team hotel. He finally quit the national team last October to make way for younger players.

“If I am elected CSKA president I am prepared to make serious investment, mainly in the club’s juvenile soccer and equipment,” Penev told a news conference on Wednesday. “I want to return to CSKA and work for the club where I grew up,” concluded Penev.

Hristo Stoichkov, the Bulgarian master of the early nineties, has also got himself involved in the admin of clubs in his homeland, where, of course, he is like royalty.

GOLF IS DANGEROUS, SAYS CRAZY GANG'S BIZARRE NEW NORWEGIAN GAFFER!

If you think things are returning to normal after Gerard Houllier shocked Reds fans by showing Paul Ince the door, think again. Bruce Grobbelaar has now accused Liverpool of reducing goalie David James to a nervous wreck. The former Mersey great is convinced that giant James should still be Liverpool's no. 1, and pushing David Seaman to the limit for the England job.

Grobbelaar, who won everything with Liverpool, declared: "As far as I am concerned, they let David down badly. The people at Anfield never made the effort to ensure David was in the right frame of mind to maximise his enormous potential."

"It is a question of getting into David's mind, and convincing him he is the tops. He has every attribute needed to be an absolutely outstanding keeper."

"If I ran a team and I had David in goal, I would get him into the England line-up, believe me."

James, bought from Watford for \$2.3 million, was hailed as the natural successor to Grobbelaar when he first arrived at Anfield with a massive reputation.

But the recent \$11 million signing of Dutch Under-21 star Sander Westerveld from Vitesse Arnhem signalled the end for 6ft 5in James under Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier.

James once claimed a loss of form was due to him playing too many video games!

playing days. He wears green wellies on the touchline to protect his arthritic hip from damp.

But he is also pragmatic should it all go pear-shaped: "Oh well, I've got a nice home back in Norway."

But Olsen will never try to change the spirit of the Dons as he insisted: "I want them to be more crazy - especially on the Wellington boots. I've seen their jokes and I won't stop it."

"I am a great admirer of this club. I feel like I have supported them for 10 years."

"I have always said I'd only leave Norway for Wimbledon or Brazil, but Brazil never offered me the job. I love the underdogs - maybe it is the Marxist in me."

Two months ago he was offered a job as a national coach and had fun teasing the Norwegian media.

Olsen told them: "I will only tell you which country it is by saying it has a population of over 50 million and the highest mountain is 3,200 metres." It was Iran. He turned the job down to take over at Wimbledon. But everyone had better start reading up on Ben Nevis, just in case.

Olsen, who has signed a two-year contract after quitting Valerenga to succeed Joe Kinnear, is also determined to introduce his direct football into the Premiership.

He has brought with him his long-time right-hand man Lars Tjernaas, who will team up with Mick Harford.

However Olsen has not yet met Kinnear, who is supposedly remaining at the club to help him get used to English football.

Olsen has instigated hour-long runs in pre-season training and every practice game so far has seen him use a four-five-one formation. Slightly built Olsen, who is softly spoken and methodical,

said: "Our football will be more penetrating."

"That will not always mean more long balls, but fewer back passes and square passes. I've always liked Wimbledon's style but now it will be penetration over possession."

"When I was manager of Norway we played a lot of African teams and they had 70 or 80 per cent of play, but we always beat them."

"You look at Manchester United - and I was

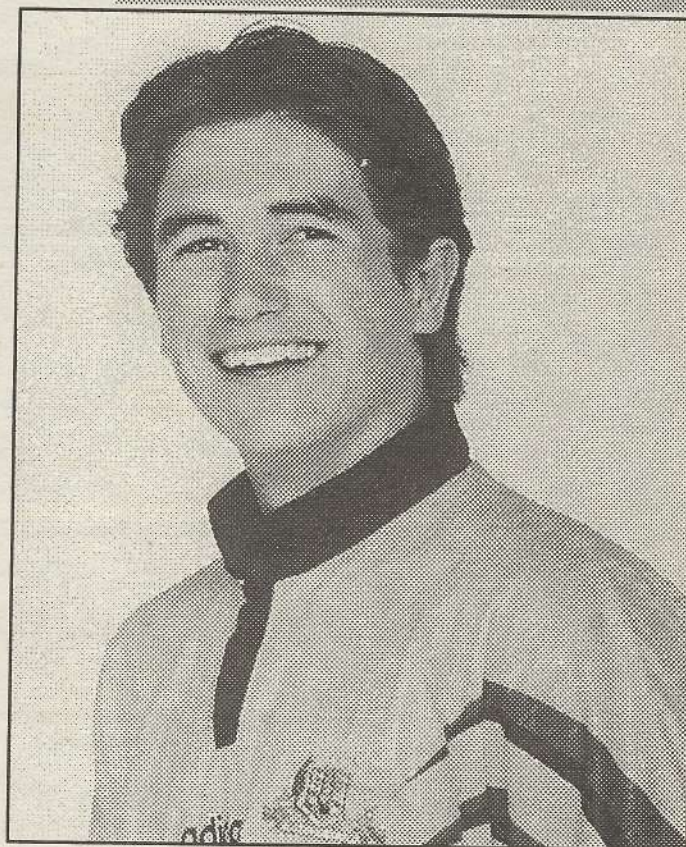
supporting them against Bayern Munich. But you have to say they were rather lucky. They played possession football and how many goal-scoring chances did they create?"

"More teams are playing possession football and that is not the way to go. I like skilful players but, remember, it takes skill to get the ball forward."

And he hates his players playing golf.

So there you have it, the Tommy Raudonikis of the English Premier League!

'Our Harry', the Kewell-meister has signed a money spinning four year deal with Leeds. Standby for more tug-o-wars with them and Soccer Australia. The Man U tour is the first test case.



Eddie Newton has joined the debate over whether or not the foreign legion in the Premier League is taking over from the English lads. He took a swipe at Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli after joining Birmingham City on a free transfer. Midfielder Newton, 27, nine years at Stamford Bridge, admitted he could not wait to escape from Vialli's foreign legion. He said: "Gianluca likes lots of players from abroad. I was just wasting my time."

"There was no way I was going to be in Chelsea's team. I realised the writing was on the wall the moment Vialli became manager, and nothing I could do was going to change the situation."

"It didn't matter how hard I worked in training, or during the rare matches when I was named in the squad. Maybe if he called himself Eduardo?"

Derby boss Jim Smith has entered the debate on agents in the marketplace, by calling them 'spivs' as he is set to lose top striker Paulo Wanchope.

A Hammers bid of pounds 2.5million for the lanky Costa Rican striker was rejected, but Smith admitted he is likely to leave for Upton Park once West Ham increase their offer. Veteran Smith then lashed out over the increasing influence of agents in soccer after his own attempts to sign new players hit problems.

He said: "We are in for two players at the moment. But agents are tending to complicate both deals."

"There's a definite case for agents. I'm all for them - but it is mushrooming into a spivs' marketplace."

"There is more hassle than ever before. There must be a million agents and they are all trying to sell you a million players."

"There are people coming into the game who are accountants, solicitors, estate agents or whatever, telling you who

these footballers are."

Smith's outburst was backed by Graham Taylor, boss of Premiership newcomers Watford. Taylor said: "Some of the money in this game is obscene and sooner or later we are going to have to stand up and say enough is enough."

"I've made inquiries about quite a few players this summer and some of the financial terms that have been demanded are laughable. It's pure folly."

"I can say now that football agents are not high on my Christmas card list. The amount of money they take from this game is quite incredible."

West Ham boss Harry Redknapp has been tracking Wanchope since the end of last season, and Smith said: "It won't happen at the moment because of the valuation, but we're not far away."

Redknapp said: "Paulo is a terrific talent and he's only 22."

New Wimbledon coach Egil Olsen will be at home coaching the 'Crazy Gang'.

Olsen, 57, held court at the club's training ground and one thing is for sure - Selhurst Park will never

be the same again.

But the former Norwegian national coach is determined not to change the Crazy Gang spirit and he declared: "I want the players to be more crazy and more aggressive."

In fact, Olsen even challenged the players to set fire to his trademark Wellington boots as their traditional welcoming ritual.

Olsen then let slip his inner thoughts, bizarre hobbies and beliefs in probably the most intriguing Press conference ever for a new Premiership manager.

Bicycle-riding Olsen revealed: His Marxist beliefs - he is a member of a political party called Red Front. Money is in danger of destroying the Premiership. He would never spend millions on players. His hobby is geography and he knows the height of every mountain in every country, the size in square metres of every country in the world and every nation's population. He will revolutionise English football with his direct style and long-ball tactics. The dangers of golf. Manchester United were "lucky to win the treble". His nickname is Drillo because that is Norwegian slang for being a good dribbler from his

MIKE BURNS HIS BRIDGES?

Sunderland's 20-year-old star Michael Bridges has been the subject of much transfer speculation since Peter Reid, his manager, put him up for transfer. Spurs were keen but that now may be not happening.

Bridges (right), who was born in North Shields, was surprisingly placed on the transfer list by manager Peter Reid after he refused to commit himself to a long-term contract. With his present deal having only 12 months to run Reid decided to invite offers for the locally-reared youngster.

Leeds United had a bid of £4.5m turned down while Aston Villa also tried to lure him to the Midlands. But now White Hart Lane boss George Graham's desire to add the precocious player to his squad has led to a £5m offer, yet this offer appears to be in jeopardy, according to Geordie media reports.

Bridges, discovered by renowned North-East scout Jack Hixon, who set young Alan Shearer on the path to fame, has displayed his potential despite being unable to win a regular first team place at the Stadium of Light. Yet he still managed to attract covetous glances from many Premiership sides last season as Sunderland ran away with the First Division title.

While Sunderland departed for pre-season games in Denmark, Bridges was left behind with another transfer-listed player Alan Johnston. The winger was also put up for sale after refusing to commit himself beyond the 12 months left on

his contract.

Reid, who has also completed the signing of German international Thomas Helmer on a free transfer, said: 'I won't have players here who might not be mentally tuned because they are seeing their contracts out. I need to know that I can put out 11 players who will give their heart and soul for the club.'

Ironically, Bridges supported Spurs as a youngster and his special idol was former England star Chris Waddle.

Meanwhile, Sunderland will be banking £8m in this week with the sale of midfielder Lee Clark to First Division new boys Fulham for £3m.

Clark, who was virtually forced to move after he was pictured wearing a T-shirt poking fun at Sunderland fans, said: 'I apologise to the Sunderland fans and want to thank them for supporting me for two years. But what matters now is Fulham.'

Helmer, 34, on the bench for Bayern Munich in the European Cup Final against Manchester United in May, has agreed a two-year contract and is looking forward to locking horns with Manchester United once again.



NEWS

Neil Shipperley has joined Barnsley from Nottingham Forest and will link up with manager Dave Bassett for the third time in his career. The 24-year-old, who joined Bassett at Crystal Palace and was also signed by the manager at Forest last season, cost £700,000.

Meanwhile Crystal Palace began their tour of China with a 2-1 win over Beijing Guoan. Clinton Morrison and China's Sun Jihai were on target for Palace. Palace have two Chinese players in their squad.

Gerry Francis, the Queens Park Rangers manager, may have to abandon plans to give out-of-contract trio Danny Maddix, Chris Kiwomya and Steve Yates new deals. All three want to stay at the club despite being entitled to free transfers but talks have not gone well and it seems certain they will begin the season on month-to-month contracts. 'We would like to sort something out but we have restrictions on the financial side because we have got to pull the club around,' said Francis. QPR were £10m in the red last year and Francis continued: 'Obviously, the players are trying to look after their interests and the club is trying to do both but we are not too close at the moment.' The players are vital to the QPR's hopes of challenging for promotion next season. Striker Kiwomya, who was rumoured at one stage to be the target of an Ericsson Cup club, became a hero with Rangers fans when he scored a hat-trick against Crystal Palace on the final day of the season to guarantee First Division survival. Maddix was named Supporters' Player of the Year and Players' Player of the Year last season. And Yates has been a QPR stalwart ever since being signed by Francis from Bristol Rovers in his original spell as Rangers manager in 1993. 'We all have QPR at heart and I would like to stay here for the rest of my career,' said Maddix. 'But it's all down to negotiations.'

Brentford have more than doubled the number of season ticket holders at Griffin Park this summer. Around 2,000 fans have already snapped up tickets to watch Ron Noades' Third Division champions.

ENGLAND 2002? IT COULD STILL HAPPEN!

Football may be coming home four years earlier than the FA's 2006 campaigners have been scheming. England are on standby to take over the 2002 World Cup from Japan and South Korea after a rebellion of the Asian nations against their limited number of places in the first Finals to be played there.

Their threat of a boycott of the qualifying competition compels FIFA to make contingency plans in case a solution cannot be found and it becomes unrealistic to take the greatest event in world sport to the Far East.

The Asian delegates rejected appeals not to walk out of FIFA congress, plunging Sepp Blatter into the first big crisis of his presidency.

He said: 'I am shocked because I had agreed with the president of their confederation to look into this problem after the end of the congress.'

World football has 60 days in which to reach a settlement, before the Asians hold an emergency congress of their own.

There is no doubt that at this stage England are far more ready to step into the breach than any of their rivals in the bidding campaign for 2006.

Still fresh from the success

of Euro 96, England have the modernised grounds, the infrastructure and the organisation still largely in place to put on a World Cup at virtually a moment's notice.

It may be necessary to accelerate the rebuilding of Wembley Stadium, a two-year project which is not due to start until September next year.

But if the chance of 2002 does come within England's grasp, the Government will be bound to step in to ensure the early completion of the work.

The governing body of the international game strove to appease the

Asians by offering them the chance of a fifth representative in the next Finals via a play-off with the 15th-placed team in Europe's qualifying competition.

UEFA made that offer mindful that it, through its president Lennart Johansson, had pushed through the unwise decision for Japan and South Korea to co-host 2002.

That compromise has been troubled from the start and this week's announcement that those Finals will have to start as early as May 23 to avoid the monsoon season threatens to cause fixture chaos in

Europe.

The hidden problem is that sharing the Finals requires two automatic places for the hosts, instead of the usual one.

It is this which is straining FIFA's delicate balance of power. For the moment, FIFA is taking the official view that the Asian revolt amounts mostly to sabre-rattling by delegates anxious to save face back home.

But the longer the protests continue and the more frequent the walk-outs, the greater the likelihood that FIFA will run out of patience and seek an alternative venue. England would not expect to be without competition if 2002 does come up for grabs.

The United States have lodged a standing offer to stage any FIFA event following the commercial success of '94 and the unprecedented success of the Women's World Cup, which concluded on the weekend.

But while America's facilities are beyond compare, the time cycle would favour England, who have not hosted the World Cup since 1966.

And this is a major boost to those who did not support the co-hosting of the Asia based World Cup, saying that they could not be trusted.

MAN UTD DEFENDS CANTONA

Eric Cantona was slammed by Busby Babes after he charged a £90,000 hotel and travel bill to survivors of the Munich Air Crash.

Cantona, 34, had agreed to lead a special European side for free in a charity match against former Manchester United team-mates at Old Trafford so money could be raised for families of victims of the 1958 disaster.

The one-off game was also to be his farewell to the club.

But it emerged that after last August's match, organisers received a bill revealing Cantona and his side had brought up to 70 family and friends with them and booked in at the four-star 132 room De Vere Mottram Hall Hotel near Wilmslow, Cheshire.

The £270-a-night hotel, which boasts golf course, swimming pool, health club, tennis courts and sauna, played host to the German team in the Euro 96 tournament.

The team had also chartered a plane from France while other guests flew in from across Europe.

Cantona's agent Pascal Carbon (no really, that's his name) then submitted an expenses bill for accommodation and travel costs coming to a total of £90,555.

It was settled the following October by the Munich Memorial Fund. The match raised more than £1 million for Munich survivors and families of victims.

But yesterday Busby Babe Ray Wood, who survived the crash, said: "I was astonished to find out it had cost £90,000 for the Cantona team to turn up."

Match organiser John Docherty, chairman of Manchester United's ex-players association hit back at the criticisms: "Cantona has nothing to apologise for. Other top continental sides would have cost more than twice as much to bring over."

And Sir Elton John is recovering after a heart operation. The 52-year-old, who had been hit by a series of health scares, checked into a private hospital in north London to have a pacemaker fitted. A source close to the millionaire pop star said he was "anxious but calm". John's money has largely benefited the Watford Football Club.

Liverpool have told Arsenal to save the cost of a fax and insist that striker Robbie Fowler is not for sale - even at £12 million.

Gerard Houllier's hectic summer rebuilding has, to a large extent, been conducted with Fowler in mind.

The Liverpool manager has never lost faith in Fowler the footballer, although off-the-field distractions have caused concern.

Boy oh boy! Giggsy v Becks

Wales is on target to face England's footballers for the first time in 15 years - at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.

The Football Association of Wales has made an approach to the FA requesting a friendly fixture some time after the Rugby World Cup in November.

The two countries last met in 1984, when a Mark Hughes goal gave Wales a 1-0 victory in Wrexham.

Now they could meet again in the 72,500-seat state-of-the-art stadium in Cardiff's city centre.

Mark Evans of the FAW said: "England is an option for Wales as an opening game to the stadium and it would be a sell-out."

"November is a possibility, but there are other dates that could be available."

A possible date is November 13, a week after the Rugby world Cup final is staged at the ground.

Evans added: "If England did accept our invitation, it would be a massive draw."

"A Giggs (pictured right) v Beckham contest would be a fabulous encounter."

The coolest Prime Minister is rapidly losing his cool over the Man Utd FA Cup situation. TONY Blair



has told Manchester United to "sort out" the row over their withdrawal from the FA Cup.

The Prime Minister said: "I think everyone wants to see Manchester United play in the FA Cup next season. It's a problem for them which they are quite capable of sorting out."

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson claimed there had been "considerable Government pressure" for his team to snub the Cup in favour of the world club championship in Brazil.

But Mr Blair insisted: "It is their decision. There are a few things I can affect but who plays in the FA Cup is not one of them. I'm not involved in sorting out football fixtures. It is a matter for Manchester United and the football authorities."

Celtic maintain their big-buying approach

Celtic is set to continue their summer spending spree by moving for Bundesliga star Jochen Kientz.

The Munich 1860 defender has been pinpointed by technical director Kenny Dalglish and coach John Barnes as the man to further shore up the club's defence.

Kientz is available at a cut-price pounds 500,000 after a bust-up with his coach Werner Lorant.

The player, who has a reputation for being outspoken, claimed that 80 per cent of the Munich dressing room wanted Lorant out.

That comment cost the centre half a place in the team and he played only eight games last term after starring 30 times for 1860 in the previous season.

Dalglish's Euro-wide network of scouts tipped him off about Kientz's availability and moves are now underway to bring the 26-year-old to Parkhead.

Celtic know they will start the season without Alan Stubbs as he continues to recuperate from illness and Marc Rieper is still deciding whether to try to overcome the toe injury that is threatening his career.

Barnes has already tied up Frenchman Olivier Tebily from Sheffield United but

needs another centre back to bolster his back division.

Kientz, who had a loan spell at Coventry four years ago, has also played with Eintracht Frankfurt and Spanish duo RCD Majorca and Logrones.

He has a year left on his contract at Munich 1860 but would jump at the chance of a move to Glasgow.

While Kientz may be moving in, Celtic's hopes of completing Stilian Petrov's transfer from CSKA Sofia were dealt a body blow yesterday when the Department of Employment rejected his work permit application.

Celtic will now take the matter to an appeals tribunal - the first of its kind in Britain - as they try to convince the authorities that the Bulgarian would enhance the Scottish game.

The 19-year-old midfielder has been knocked back because he does not meet the criteria that demands he must have played 75 per cent of his country's international matches over the past two years.

Celtic will argue that the player's age has made that impossible but the club now knows that there is little chance of having Petrov in their team before the start of the season and, with CSKA Sofia due to play a UEFA Cup tie on

August 12, the player will be cup-tied if he plays.

A spokesman for the Department of Employment said: "The work permit for Stilian Petrov has not been granted and Celtic have been informed. However, under the new criteria, there is now an appeals procedure in place."

"We are in the process of setting up a panel. This will consist mainly of members of football's governing bodies such as the SFA and SPL and they will be accountable to Secretary of State, David Blunkett."

Eyal Berkovic arrived in Glasgow yesterday to undergo the medical that should see him finally become a Parkhead player today.

A fee of pounds 5.5m has been agreed with West Ham and, with all but the most minor personal details still to be tied up, it seems certain that Berkovic will join his new team-mates in Norway this week.

The team flies out today and, although it is unclear if Berkovic will be on the flight, Dutch winger Bobby Petta will.

He, too, underwent a medical yesterday and will almost certainly complete the formalities that will make him a Celtic player by this afternoon.

But it's unlikely that Everton's attacking midfielder Nick Barmby will join Celtic. Both clubs have denied the move.

Aussie Mark Viduka is back training with the side but it is unsure how long he will be with the club.

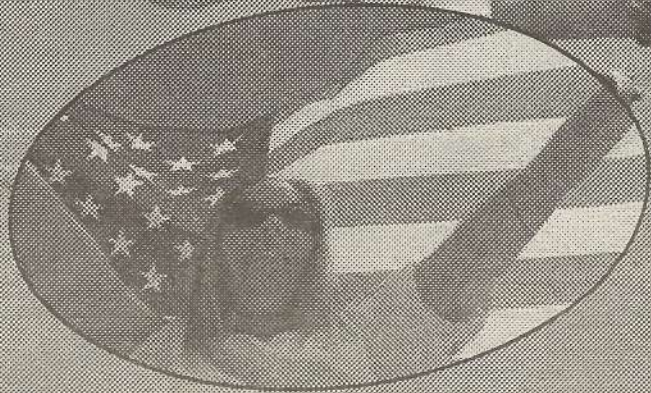
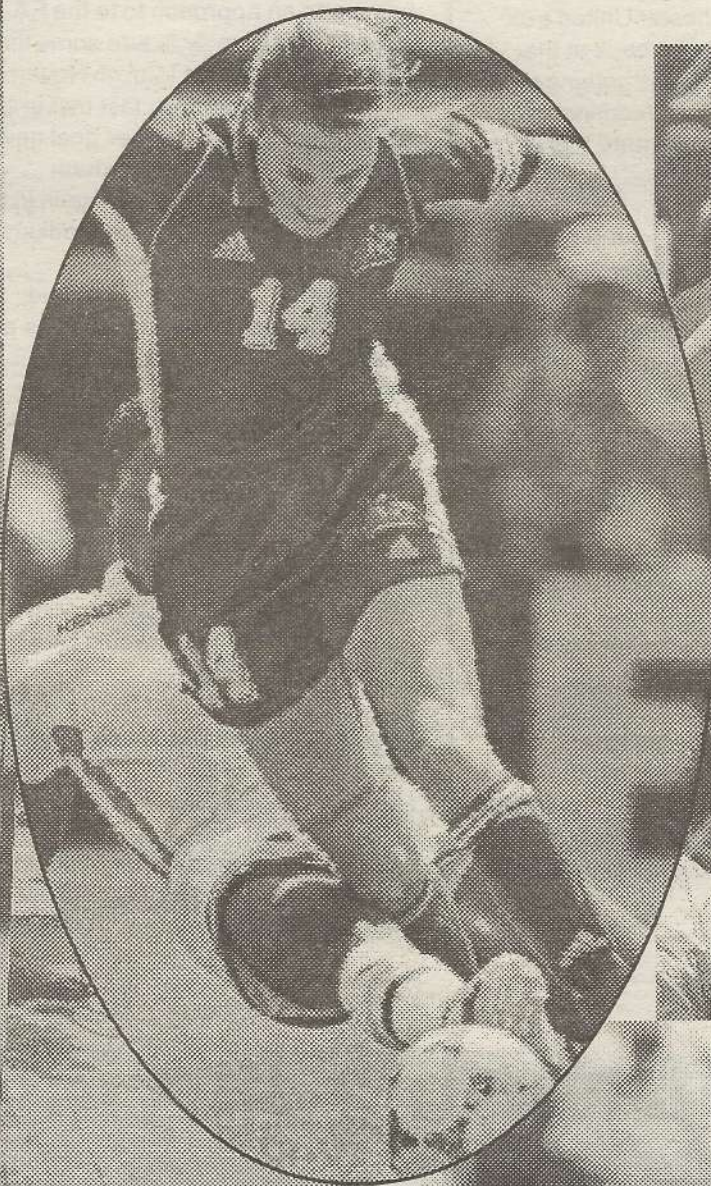
Meanwhile Scotland soccer coach Craig Brown could find his position under threat following newspaper allegations today that he sang anti-Catholic songs on an answerphone message to a girlfriend.

Reports claimed that Brown sang parts of traditional terrace songs popular with Rangers fans but which predominantly Catholic Celtic followers consider offensive and inflammatory.

Brown is a former Rangers player and a popular figure in Scotland who has made enormous efforts to break down the religious divide that had dogged the game. He denied today that he was a bigot and said he intended to take legal action against the newspaper.

"The main thrust of the litigation is in respect of the allegations of bigotry, which I completely deny," he said. "I am not and never have been a bigot, as friends and colleagues of all persuasions will be able to confirm."

MAMMA MIA! WHAT A WORLD CUP



ALL THE WORLD CUP FINAL NEWS INSIDE
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